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# GRACE CLIFFORD

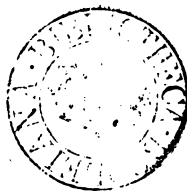
A Novel

BY

H. BOUVERIE PIGOTT

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I



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# GRACE CLIFFORD.

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## CHAPTER I.

### STEDLEIGH MANOR.

THE sun was shining over the broad sleeping sea, and across the wood and lawn of Stedleigh. The glow of summer was gone; golden autumn lights rested on the trees, where as yet the changing season only showed in the varied beauty of brown and green and yellow.

Stedleigh was a grand old place. I must try to sketch it with my pen, as others have sketched it with their pencils. They came from all sides, gay tourists, and dusty tourists, artists young and old, amateurs who could draw, and amateurs who could only hundle;

for Stedleigh lay right in the path of summer wanderers. So they took it from the hill, from the valley, and from the sea, while some took it, as I am taking it now, from the foot of the incline that sloped up from the edge of a silver lake, with a pretty ivy-covered boat-house on its margin, and the light pleasure-boat moored to the trunk of a broad beech, whose bending boughs, weighty with still unscattered foliage, droop into the stream.

The house stood on the summit of the hill. It was a large building, fronted with white stone; high broad steps, led under a wide colonnade, supported by tall pillars. Two huge stone lions guarded the entrance, reclining on their posts, with outstretched paws and heads erect; their curled lips, shewing the long teeth in their massive stone jaws; but they were harmless beasts after all. Notwithstanding its stern guardians, Stedleigh was a very peaceful place, although it had witnessed strange things in its day, and more than once changed masters. Down below on the shore, people pointed out the creek from whence the then owner of Stedleigh stole away in an

open boat, to meet the ship that was to take him to France, in order to follow the fortunes of the second Charles. His name had been written on the roll of Battle Abbey, and his blood made him cling to the King, in place of the Parliament, so one of Cromwell's Roundhead officers got the grant of Stedleigh. Years had gone by since then, and Stedleigh had once more changed masters. The descendants of the Roundhead-soldier, instead of cropping their polls, and howling hymns, kept fox-hounds and hunters, rode, drank, and gambled, until the Stedleigh acres refused to bear the weight of another mortgage, and the old place passed by purchase to Mr. Westbrooke, a rich London banker, who came down to Stedleigh with his head full of alterations, building plans, and what not besides. Two new wings rose up where old battlemented towers once stood on each side of the centre building; and on these wings were placed two stone eagles, who with spread pinions seemed threatening to swoop down on the visitor as he approached; and Mr. Westbrooke congratulated himself on the fine idea it was to match

the two kings of beasts under the colonnade, with the two kings of birds above it.

The elevation on which the house stood was tracked with terrace steps round and round, between which were dotted gay flower beds, interspersed with patches of bright green grass, until the terraces ended on the smooth level sward of the lawn on the one side, and the brink of the lake on the other. Behind the house stretched the old wood, where maple, alders and stout oaks mixed with white barked lime trees, and green and copper beeches. Tall poplars; steeples of foliage pointed to the sky, while shadows light and dark rested on the golden brown of the autumn foliage. Quiet as it appeared in the distance, the wood was stirring with busy life. The whistling note of the blackbird was echoed by the wood-pigeon's cry, while the robin singing his song mingled with the full gushing trill of the thrush. Through the trees with stealthy step, and wary eye, a fox crept with a poor water-fowl in his mouth which he had caught up the lake stream, and a bright cock pheasant peeped down on him from a neighbouring bough

where he sat dressing his pretty feathers before he went to rest, while a daring squirrel crossed his path, whisking up a branch, with his tail over his head. There, away to the right, lay the broad blue sea, fringed with bold crags, rising grey and stern out of the water. Beyond again was the village of Stedleigh close by the sea-side, with its landing piers from whence the fishing boats, whose white sails are dotting the edge of the horizon, went out at early morning with the hope of many a home aboard them.

As the sun declines and night shadows begin to fall, three figures come over the lake towards the house ; they pass under the broad trees out upon the open path, then up the terrace steps, and in through the drawing-room window, in the right wing, which lies open to the ground. The party consists of a lady and two gentlemen. The lady, who has the right of precedence in the introduction, is young, fair and slight. Long curls fall over her neck and shoulders, and her pretty head is poised on a well turned throat, her face is calm and placid, in its expression, more sweet

than beautiful, although she is pretty and graceful enough to please the elder of the two gentlemen who walks by her side, and keeps bending down talking to her assiduously. Like his companion this gentleman is fair-haired and blue-eyed, with a frank expression in his thoroughly English face. He wears a suit of grey clothes fitting closely to his well set, but not very tall figure, which has something of the sailor build, although he has never been at sea. The other gentleman who goes carelessly along a little in advance of the party, is the young lady's brother. He is some three years her junior, and—I was going to describe him, but I have changed my mind. He is to be my hero; his good deeds, and misdeeds are to be the staple out of which I must build my story, so I cannot think of bringing him in at the end of a chapter, as if he were nobody at all.

While I have been thinking about Archibald Douglas, the party have gone indoors, the lights are burning in the drawing-room, and the curtains drawn. Marion Douglas is at the piano singing a song she promised Harry

Osborne as they came homewards; Harry stands by her, turning her music, while my hero has flung himself into a chair, in a very careless unhero-like manner. He is whistling the air his sister plays, and pulling the ears of a great shaggy dog, who has followed his master all the day, and now lies at his feet. Night is over Stedleigh. The light from the drawing-room gleams out through the curtains on the terraces. Everything is still, the world is asleep, the fox has eaten his supper, the squirrel has gone to rest, bird notes are heard no longer, and the whit-tu whoo' of the owl and the flapping of bats' wings, are the only sounds that break the silence.



## CHAPTER II.

### RETROSPECTIVE.

IN following out the heading of my chapter, I feel that I am putting a tax upon the patience of my readers in asking them to go backwards instead of forwards, but I must needs give a retrospective glance at the history of the people I am writing about, and then, when we get the clue in our hands as to who they are, and what they are, we shall try to get on pleasantly to the end, without again tripping up the interest of my story, that is to say if it have any interest to trip up.

Mr. Douglas was known as Mr. Douglas of

the Grange before his marriage with Mary Westbrooke, the daughter of a London banker, who had purchased Stedleigh when it was in the market. The two properties adjoined each other, and when Mr. Westbrooke came to reside on his newly acquired estate, old Mr. Douglas and he struck up an acquaintance which ended in a close intimacy.

Archibald Douglas was a tall, strong youth in those days. He was well built in figure, and rather handsome in features, but of a beauty that had a certain hardness in it—a ruggedness of brow, a thinness of lip and an expression of sternness rarely seen in so young a face. He was of Scotch descent by his father's side and of English by his mother's. At the time of their marriage Mr. and Mrs. Douglas had not much to begin life upon, he having only his pay as a lieutenant in a Scottish regiment, and his wife some trifling sum of money; consequently their rash love match angered the grandfather of our Mr. Douglas, and led him to leave whatever remnants of broken up family property he had in his power to his second son instead of the elder.

In later years, while Archibald Douglas was still a child, the death of Mrs. Douglas's brother put her in possession of the Grange, after which event her husband left the army and went to reside there.

The young heir to their good fortune was in due time sent to Eton, and then to Oxford, where he distinguished himself more by his prowess in all manly sports than by any unusual aptitude for learning. Yet his love for such exercises never led him into any of the scrapes or dangers of his more reckless companions.

Debt he always abhorred ; notwithstanding the temptation to expense surrounding him and the example set him by others, he was never tempted to exceed his allowance, and passed through College without blame or trouble. Anything like an untruth he shrunk from ; a school or college companion could never induce young Douglas to shelter him by a falsehood. If he were asked who did this or that, he would not say he did not know, but he would say he would not tell, and bear the penalty of his temerity unflinchingly.

In those days gymnastics were not the science they have become now, but school and college lads had their games of rough, healthy play; and at rowing, leaping, or raising heavy weights, none could beat young Douglas of The Grange. But one thing was strange, notwithstanding his fearless courage, notwithstanding his powerful strength, attributes far higher in the estimation of school fellows and college chums than grasp of mind or educational attainments, Douglas had not been a favourite either at Eton or Oxford. Perhaps it was because he was not a lad of warm feelings or quick sympathies. No fellow ever thought of coming to him in trouble or difficulty. He did not get into scrapes himself, and had little pity for those who did. Yet his heart was not callous, nor his purse closed to the unfortunate, although he had scant compassion for trouble self-produced.

He looked at the sinner, and saw not the distress or fear he suffered for his folly, but the sin. He could be just, cruelly just, sometimes. It never occurred to him through life that if the measure he dealt to others were dealt to him,

where would he be? If the Judge of all our actions kept looking ever at our crimes, and never saw our sorrow or repentance, how many errors in his own life might have remained unatoned. Such natures as his rarely excite or hold the love of their fellow men. Faulty characters are often more popular, and so he passed through Eton and Oxford without winning love; but he passed through them blamelessly, affording no cause for cavil at home or abroad.

Several years passed away, during which Archibald Douglas never seemed to think of marriage. But when the death of both his parents left The Grange empty, he began looking about with a view of giving it a mistress.

In those times young country squires did not whirl away by rail in search of a bride, as if none of the fair girls in their own neighbourhood, who had grown up under their eye, were good enough for them. Those were the slow coach days, before the railway had made travelling as rapid and agreeable as it is now. Ladies and gentlemen did not gad

about, and pick one another up matrimonially, on the ascent to Vesuvius, or at some German Spa. Then Italy was an unknown region, and the Pyramids of Egypt the antipodes; whereas now a run over to Alexandria and Cairo is nothing, and a trip to Germany and Switzerland has become a Sabbath day's journey.

But as carriages were only beginning to be propelled by steam in the courting days of Mr. Douglas of the Grange, he just looked round the fair olive branches about his neighbour's stables, and chose Miss Westbrooke of Stedleigh, who had grown from childhood to womanhood during the years which had elapsed since he quitted college.

It was a wise choice, just such a one as people might have supposed Mr. Douglas likely to make; for Stedleigh was a property ten times more valuable than The Grange, and as the lands adjoined each other, they could be amalgamated conveniently. One end of Mr. Douglas's lawn looked out over the broad meadows of the Stedleigh estate. They were so close that surely they should

belong to one proprietor; so he leisurely set about winning the lady and the land at one and the same time.

The overtures of the handsome young Scotchman were well received by Miss Westbrooke herself, and her father, who was getting up in years, and broken in health, yielded to her wishes in the matter, satisfied with the safe character of the man to whose care he entrusted her. It was true the value of the Grange rent-roll was nothing in comparison to Stedleigh, or to that of other wooers of Miss Westbrooke. But more showy pretensions, or a larger income, might be accompanied by unsettled habits or ruinous extravagance. Mr. Westbrooke knew that neither The Grange nor Stedleigh Manor would be likely to become less in the hands of Mr. Douglas and he suffered his daughter to bestow herself and her possessions on her stalwart suitor, to whom she had given all the warmth of affection she was mistress of.

Mrs. Douglas did not love her husband passionately—but passionate love was not a part of her nature. She was a quiet, good

girl, with no nonsense about her ; Mr. Douglas liked her all the better in that she was not demonstrative.

For the first five years of their married life they were childless. During that time old Mr. Westbrooke died, and the two properties were joined together. But what was the use of them if there was no son to inherit the broad lands ? At the end of these five years a child was born, but it was a girl, and only lived three weeks. Then four more years passed away without another face coming to gladden the household.

The son so anxiously looked for never came, and at the close of nine years Mrs. Douglas died in giving birth to a second daughter, from whom her father, even in the early days of mourning for the death of his wife, turned away in angry disappointment.

It may seem unnatural that the loss of the mother did not make him cling to the child, but it did not. The springs of our feelings are strange sometimes. Accustomed to have his own way, successful in life as he had been, one thing had been denied him, and he could



not bear it. This puny, fair-haired child, whose sex divided her from her father's love, was to be the heiress of the wide acres of Stedleigh. In the time to come she would bring it, as her mother had done, into another family, and sink the name of Douglas in that of her husband.

This was her father's grievance. Had her mother died childless the property was to come to him. Then he might have married again, and given it an heir of the right sort; now it was hopeless. This child was a barrier to his dream of masculine posterity. None of us are fond of barriers to our desires, still less such men as Mr. Douglas.

At the end of a year of widowerhood, when his little girl was just able to toddle, Mr. Douglas did a foolish thing. He married again—not that marrying in itself was foolish; he was a youngish man, only forty-three, and no one expected that he would sit alone much longer by a desolate hearth—but the choice he made was foolish, very foolish. It was inconsistent with the steady uniformity of his past life, which had always turned in the

right groove until he committed the extravagance of marrying a young girl for love.

1 ✓ The act was so utterly opposed to his nature, as it had hitherto exhibited itself, that it took people by surprise. It unhinged all their preconceived notions of him, and set them first wondering and then finding fault.

It is strange that, although we are not accountable to people for our acts, they will go on cavilling at and questioning them. That Mr. Douglas meant to marry Miss Osborne when he began visiting constantly at Admiral Osborne's, was a thing everybody expected, and everybody approved of, excepting, of course, the mothers of young ladies who were not the objects of his choice, or the young ladies themselves. But to the people about the neighbourhood of Stedleigh generally, the thing seemed fitting and right.

Miss Osborne possessed a good sum in the funds, and that is very desirable in a lady, and by no means lessens her matrimonial value. "What did that handsome man see in that plain, uninteresting woman he married?" we have heard asked. The answer, "Oh!

she had a large fortune !” settles the matter at once. The questioner elevates his brows, smiles, nods, and goes away satisfied. It is a thing of every-day occurrence. The gentleman has sold his inches, his beauty, and his freedom for so much a year. People say they are not happy. The lady, perhaps, is exacting or jealous—the gentleman captious and discontented. But then they look well in public, and as to private life, they get through it somehow.

Miss Osborne was plain, stiff, and uninteresting, with nothing to recommend her but that money in the funds. Her father had been a distinguished naval officer, who, having retired on an Admiral’s rank and pay, came to live near the Manor in a house perched on a bluff headland over-looking the sea.

So long accustomed to the roar of the ocean, he could not bear an inland residence, and meant to live and die with the music of the surf in his ears.

Admiral Osborne had had three sons, two of whom perished in the cause of their country. Bitterly the old man mourned the

Dead, for although the father's pride gloried in the gallant death his two brave sons had found, grief could not be stilled by flattering encomiums in despatches, or the monument their comrades erected in their honour. They had lived together, served together, and died together. This was the simple story, and the old man prematurely bowed by their loss, retired from the service, and took up his residence at Stedleigh.

Here his third son, who was the youngest of the Admiral's family, and a mere child at his brother's death, soon sprouted into a tall, straight boy, perilously fond of the sea, from which his father always tried to wean him. This one, at least, should not enter naval life, lest he, too, might be swept away.

But now we must return to Mr. Douglas and his wooing. Neither handsome in person, nor agreeable in manner, Charlotte Osborne had scant chance of matrimony, except through the intervention of that potent sum in the funds. But if her want of attraction did not signify in the eyes of the Stedleigh people, it did in those of Mr. Douglas !

Pretty women, according to the popular notion received at Stedleigh in those days, were good-for-nothing, idle, dressy creatures, with whom a wise man would not be burdened. Nurses were fond of telling their charges how much better goodness was than beauty, until they actually grew to believe that amiability and loveliness were incompatible. It was a pleasant doctrine for Stedleigh, too, and perhaps that caused its general acceptance. The Stedleigh ladies being far more useful than ornamental, excellent mothers, excellent housekeepers, harmless gossiping women, but not famous for personal charms—women who were married probably because those non-travelling days narrowed the choice of their suitors.

Stedleigh had it all settled that Miss Osborne was to be Mrs. Douglas. She was just the person for him. He wanted a mother for his little girl, and a companion for himself, not a flaunting, pretty woman, to spend his money. Well these may be the kind of wives our friends and the public choose for us, and as they are of course the best, it is a

sad pity that perverse human nature will not resign itself to the arrangements of such wise counsellors, and marry and be given in marriage in the full sense of the words.

Perhaps the reader guesses, shrewd as I am sure he is, that Mr. Douglas is not going to marry Miss Osborne, but some one else very different, whom the good people of Stedleigh never thought of. Far-seeing and astute as they were, one thing was overlooked, namely, that the Cliff contained another lady inmate besides Miss Osborne. However, if the Stedleigh folk forgot it, Mr. Douglas did not, and it was she who held the rein that drew him so often to the Admiral's.

This lady was the daughter of an Irish clergyman, who at one time had been chaplain on board the Admiral's ship. During that period a strong friendship had sprung up between them, and subsequently through his friend's good offices, he obtained a parish in the west of Ireland, where he married, and was left a widower with one daughter.

This girl, in the early days of womanhood, had become, at the death of her father, a

portionless orphan ; and the kind old Admiral, who had just then left the navy, brought her to the Cliff, where she remained until Mr. Douglas, at the staid age of forty-three, transferred her to Stedleigh Manor.

The fact that it was Margaret De Rinzy, and not Charlotte Osborne that was destined to become Mrs. Douglas, threw all Stedleigh into a state of consternation. It was like the shock of an earthquake. "Such a fool as Mr. Douglas was, and at his time of life, too!" But people forget that men don't think themselves even at forty-three utterly beyond the pale of a woman's love. And widowers with only a slight tinge of frost on their heads and none at all at their hearts, are apt to consider a young wife a very desirable appendage, no matter what may be the opinion of their neighbours on the subject, therefore Mr. Douglas set all Stedleigh at defiance, and married Miss De Rinzy.

It is a hardship if a man cannot indulge in one folly during his life without being found fault with. Mr. Douglas had never before done a foolish or a rash thing in all the forty-

three years he had lived in the world, and surely the wisest among us can scarcely say so much as this.

"After all, it may not be a folly; she may make him a good wife and his child a good mother," some one said. "Aye, may," the Stedleigh people would echo; "who knows but it may snow in June some day?"

If there were numbers who condemned Mr. Douglas's choice, and were even angry with him because they had guessed wrong, there were others who laughed at their surprise. These were chiefly, I am sorry to say, the male portion of the inhabitants, many of whom, notwithstanding the Stedleigh doctrine, thought a pretty girl a very desirable thing, although they scarcely dare utter the heresy aloud.

Amongst the laughers was the good old Admiral himself, who thought he had made a capital provision for the daughter of his old friend, and was highly amused at the effect of the marriage on the steady minds of his surprised acquaintances.

Mrs. Douglas's beauty had been a snare



to her husband—at least, so all Stedleigh declared; but whether it had been a snare in the somewhat evil sense in which they used the word or not, it had captivated him beyond a doubt, and even the most envious Stedleigh young lady could not deny that it was a beauty very likely to captivate.

Her cast of features were not such as we meet with on this side the channel, and the novelty of her style added to its charm. Her eyes were of the dark grey mixed with blue, prevalent in her race, with long lashes falling on an oval olive cheek. Her forehead, not very high, was smooth and polished, and shaded by soft dark hair. The whole expression of her face was that of vivacity, mellowed by a softness about the eyes and mouth which gave a rare charm to the whole.

Whether or not this pretty “bit o’ painted clay,” to use John Knox’s phrase for the lovely Scottish Queen, loved her husband was a subject of debate with the Stedleigh folk, and one that they were never able to settle satisfactorily. She made him a good, atten-

tive wife, at all events; the most censorious could scarcely deny that. But three-and-twenty years is a great difference in the ages of a husband and wife, and it is not to be expected that a girl of twenty could entertain any very passionate affection for a man of forty-three—the chasm is far too wide. But there are so many chords in a woman's heart, that men even somewhat advanced in life may touch some of them.

There is honour and reverence, the regard and influence that an earnest manly nature can obtain over a woman, if she be a good woman. Besides this, there is the feeling of gratitude for name and position, perhaps, or for protection and kindness, faults gently borne, with tenderness never withheld. With such weapons as these a man may win with the odds against him, and make his way to his wife's heart in spite of some disparity in years, that is, if she have a heart.

As for Mrs. Douglas, gratitude was probably the kind of love she gave her husband, and gratitude from a warm, thankful, impulsive nature like hers, was as strong, in

appearance, at least, as the very great affection he had inspired in the gentle heart which lay still in Stedleigh Churchyard.

To a man of Mr. Douglas's age matrimony is a thing to be looked in the face, and done in a matter-of-fact earnest way. Over his courtship there had been no clouds, no perverseness either on the lady's part or on his own. But I am afraid I must admit that with all his cool philosophy, he was by far the most in love of the two.

Miss De Rinzy liked him on the whole, although she sometimes shrunk from his cold stiffness. She admired his tall, straight figure and handsome face, on which time had not traced many lines; she was flattered at his attentions to her, and somewhat dazzled and pleased with the good fortune fate had thrown in her way. Hundreds of women marry on grounds like these and are happy. Why should not she?

This quiet, equable frame of mind made the courting go on pleasantly without any of the wrecks a deeper love might have caused in such a temperament as Mrs. Douglas's.

She did not lie awake thinking of him, going over his words or looks until she got ashamed of her own absorption. When he went away at night and said he would be back to-morrow, she received it as a fact that needed no further thinking about. Should he be away all day and come in the evening, the intervening hours were not spent in calculating the probable moment of his arrival, watching slyly through the window, or listening for his step in the hall. She did not stick her needle in her finger in place of in her embroidery on such occasions, but just put aside her work and received him with a pleasant smile of welcome. Then he would sit by her, and talk to her or Miss Osborne, or play chess with the Admiral.

"A sensible, good girl," Mr. Douglas pronounced her to be; "no fits of petulance, no petty exactions with her, such as other women indulge in."

Poor Mr. Douglas!—it never occurred to him that she did not love him, and that all this quiescence which he admired so much shewed that she did not. And if the half

grateful affection, half reverential awe in which she held him as lover and husband were not sufficient to satisfy her nature, he knew nothing of the need that craves for more.

All through the early months that followed her marriage, she felt a yearning and a want which this dull, pulseless gratitude could never fill. But this yearning and this want ceased when a boy came to gladden the household. How the mother's heart went out to him with the full force of a love whose farthest depths had never before been reached.

Mr. Douglas gloried in the child; gloried in the fulfilment of that wish so long ungranted. He had only one sore spot left, and that was, that the little girl of his first wife must have the lion's share of the property. That took some of the comfort away from his rejoicing, and made him more impatient of the presence of the innocent offender.

As Marion Douglas grew up she found a consolation for her father's lack of love in the affection of her step-mother; and when we get our first glimpse of Stedleigh two-and-

twenty years after Mr. Douglas's second marriage, Marion has grown to womanhood, and Archie Douglas is a fine tall handsome fellow, with a great deal of good-humour and a great deal of self-will. Mr. Douglas, as we see, is still at the head of affairs, guiding the Stedleigh household with a firm hand.

## CHAPTER III.

## MRS. DOUGLAS AND HER STEP-DAUGHTER.

Mrs. DOUGLAS was standing in her dressing-room window when the party crossed the lawn ; she watched them coming with slow steps, as if unwilling to leave the soft evening air which had enticed them out of doors.

Marion's shawl, which had fallen half off one shoulder, was sweeping the ground, and they stopped at the foot of the terrace steps while Harry restored it to its place.

There was nothing in the act itself ; any gentleman would catch a lady's shawl, and replace it on her shoulders, whether the shoulders were as round and fair as Marion

Douglas's or not. We have enjoyed the pleasure of wrapping up the pretty girls whose heads we have waltzed giddy at a ball, and gone the next night and wrapped up other pretty girls with equal pleasure ; but Osborne's manner of drawing up Marion's shawl was something different to this ; there was an earnest carefulness about it that freed it from all appearance of the flirting gallantries of a ball-room.

Women measure these things in a moment, and Mrs. Douglas was not slow in her deductions. True, in her own courting days there had been few love passages between her and her sober lover. Mr. Douglas had come and gone between Stedleigh and the Cliff in a very quiet matter-of-fact way.

He had sat by her talking while she worked, chilling her natural gaiety by his dull prosaics. She remembered him well walking by her and Miss Osborne along the beach, uttering a little stiff compliment now and then, with something more pointed dropping in occasionally to show his intention of making her mistress of Stedleigh, and how



fit he thought her to fill the place of her lost mother to his little girl.

How much of her fitness lay in her power to please Mr. Douglas himself—what her beauty and her youth had to do with his differing so strongly with the Stedleigh people, when they thought Miss Osborne more suitable for the mature master of Stedleigh Manor—I cannot say. All I know is that the wooing had been of the most commonplace description. But Mrs. Douglas's perceptions regarding others were not the less keen for that, and as she stood in the window her thoughts ran somewhat in this strain.

“Here every day this week, and nearly every day this summer, for that matter, I have been expecting an ending like this. What will Mr. Douglas say?”

The shawl business had settled it, Mrs. Douglas had even gone so far as to think they were engaged. Hence the not unnatural question to any one who knew him as well as his wife did, of what would Mr. Douglas say. She lingered by the window until they came up the terrace steps, and disappeared in the

shadow of the house. Should she go down stairs and join them. No, Archie was there, and he was able to take care of his sister.

As soon as she had decided on not going to the drawing room, she threw herself on her dressing room sofa, and went on thinking of Marion.

As she lay there alone in the twilight the question presented itself again, what would Mr. Douglas think? and then another question followed, what did she herself think? She scarcely knew. Harry was very good, very kind hearted, and she had no doubt but he would make Marion an excellent husband. Yet he was not the sort of man she would have chosen for herself, if she were placed as her step-daughter was, free to choose, and free to love.

Mrs. Douglas, like many other women situated as she had been in her youth, had never loved and never chosen. She had married the man that circumstances had carved out for her, and her friends advised her acceptance of. The line of her life had been chalked for her, and she walked upon it

as many other women similarly placed have walked.

There was no chord in Mr. Douglas's nature to answer to the quick, eager lovingness of his wife. Her very anger rapid to burn, and rapid to die out, found no response in the calm stoicism of her husband. She knew that he loved her after a fashion of his own ; but his fashion was not her fashion. He was cold even in his kindness, and that coldness drove all her love in upon her heart, only to break out for her son and the little motherless girl she had taken in her arms in Stedleigh nursery the day she came home a bride.

But Marion's case lay apart from hers. She loved Harry Osborne, and there was no earthly reason why she should not marry him. Even her father could scarcely cavil at him as a match for her. The more Mrs. Douglas thought, the more she became convinced of this. Look at it what way she would, the thing seemed desirable, and at the end of half an hour she was drowsily reasoning herself to think so.

The twilight was nearly gone, and the room

was very dim. Mrs. Douglas closed her eyes a moment and opened them suddenly ; surely she was not going to sleep. She was conscious enough to know that Marion was playing and singing below, the sound of her voice came indistinctly up through the ceiling.

She looked round the room to try and keep herself awake ; her eye wandered from the pink silk and lace with which it was hung, to the statuettes that stood on pedestals in the corners, and then rested on a pretty inlaid table on which was a vase filled with flowers. The vase was covered with a coloured design representing Venus, with her son in her lap, bending over the mischievous urchin, and trying to hold down his wings.

It had been given to Mrs. Douglas by her husband after Archie's birth, and perhaps nothing could have more fully shewn the proud delight he took both in mother and child, than his allowing his practical mind to feel the association that led to the gift.

The sight of the vase brought Archie to her mind. Not as the tall man he was now ; but as he lay in her lap one and twenty years

ago, a little morsel of flesh and bone smothered and muslin.

Then the drowsy sensation returned, and began to confuse her thoughts. The tinkle of Marion's music ceased, and in another minute she was asleep.

More than an hour after a low knock came to the dressing room door, and then another, the last somewhat louder than the first. Mrs. Douglas awoke, and called "come in," and Marion entered, with her hat in her hand, and her shawl over her arm.

"You are all in the dark, mamma," she said, trying to distinguish where Mrs. Douglas was.

"I have been asleep, shall I ring for lights," she asked, sitting upright on the sofa.

"Not yet," Marion said, laying her shawl and hat on a chair. "I came to enquire about your head ache, is it better?" She went over and sat by her step-mother on the sofa. The moon was up, and came shining into the room, giving them light enough to see each other pretty well, now that Marion's eyes were getting accustomed to the semi-darkness.

"My head is quite well now, I have had

such a cosy sleep, which has just fitted me for a cosy chat. What have you and Harry been about this evening?"

"Harry?"

"Yes Harry, I saw you coming across the lawn two hours ago, and I saw——"

"What?" Marion asked with a flush, which the darkness hid.

"Archie following with his dog," Mrs. Douglas said, filling up the sentence. She laughed and Marion laughed too. "Now Marion what was Harry saying? you are going to tell me, I know, for there was intended confidence in your footstep, as you came creeping in."

Such a direct puzzling question for a girl to answer; Marion blushed and laughed, and laughed and blushed again without replying.

"No need of asking, Marion, you have promised to be his wife," Mrs. Douglas said, slipping her arm round her step-daughter's waist.

"No indeed, I did not."

"Well, he asked you. No nonsense, come know it."

"How did you know it?"

"By a way I have of guessing things," Mrs. Douglas said, drawing Marion closer.

"Well, you have guessed right," Marion said, colouring and playing with her chain. "You will stand between papa and me, won't you, mamma?"

"There will be no need of it dear, the admiral will see him, I suppose, and all will go well, he cannot object, you know."

"You really think he cannot," Marion said, hopefully leaning on her step-mother's stronger nature for support.

"But if he does, will you—"

"Never mind what I shall do, but this much rest assured of, I shall not let you fight single handed, if fighting be necessary we shall battle together." Mrs. Douglas's voice grew broad and soft, her almost forgotten Irish accent peeping out, as it always did when she and Marion, or she and Archie exchanged confidences, and enjoyed private chats.

"You like Harry, don't you, mamma? and are you not glad of it?" Marion questioned.

"I like him very much my dear; he is

good and kind, and I hope he may make you happy."

Some of the heartiness had dropped out of Mrs. Douglas's voice, and with a woman's quickness Marion missed it.

"Why don't you say you are glad, mamma? Are you not glad?"

"Yes dear, of course I am glad of anything that satisfies you; and as to Harry, he is as I have said good and kind; what more does a woman want in an husband?"

"Nothing of course, but there is something more you want."

"What a cross-examiner you are, Marion. There is but one fault I see in Harry, he is a little bit purposeless and weak I think, but you are not very firm, so you will do grandly together."

"Oh, is that all?" Marion said relieved. "I rather like him for that; if he were as firm as papa he would frighten me."

Mrs. Douglas laughed. "Well you are both caught and caged," she said, "but I knew it must be so from the moment I saw Harry coming wandering here so often. You were



an idle pair with nothing to fall back on except the society of each other. Harry just loose from college, dying to fall in love by way of occupation; and you, tired of still life at Stedleigh, dying to fall in love for want of occupation too. What else would any sensible person expect to be the end of it?"

"Yet I don't think papa saw it," Marion said.

"Of course he did not—men never do see such things. They are quite above them. When they come on they are ready to throw up their hands and eyes in amazement."

"Come in." This was in answer to a knock demanding admittance; and a girl entered with a lighted lamp. Marion shrunk away from it, as if the maid could read her secret in her face, while Mrs. Douglas said, "It is getting late I think Ellen, and you may go to bed, I shall not want you to-night."

"Very well ma'am," Ellen said, drawing the curtains and putting the room to rights.

This girl was Mrs. Douglas's maid, and a country woman of her own, the grand-daughter

of her old nurse, whom she had brought over from Ireland some years before, when quite a little girl, and had kept about her ever since. She was a pretty bright faced girl, with dark hair and the soft grey eyes so common amongst her country women.

Ellen had scarcely left the room, when a voice outside the door said, "may I come in?" and Archie, opening it as he put the question, walked into the room.

Tall and dark complexioned, with a handsome oval face, the expression of Archie's eye and smile was that of easy good humour; but when his features were in repose, his firmly cut mouth, strongly resembling his father's, although marked by less severe lines, gave evidence of his possessing some of the self-willed Douglas blood, that might break out if occasion called for it.

As he came smiling into his mother's dressing-room, however, there was no sign of the sterner side of his character, and Mrs. Douglas watched him with a mother's pride as he came over to the table, and took a chair opposite her and his sister.

"I thought you and Marion were in bed, mother, until I heard your voices as I passed the door," he said, leaning his forehead on his hand, and running his fingers through the curls of his dark hair, which lay in rings round his head.

"Indeed it is almost time, Archie," Mrs. Douglas answered with a smile at her son. "But Marion and I got into chat and forgot ourselves."

"If I had known you were up I should have been here an hour ago," Archie said, putting his hand to his mouth to suppress a yawn; "and Marion never told me she was coming here. I fell asleep down stairs over a book, But what ails you Marion? you are looking as solemn as a judge."

"I am not solemn but sleepy," Marion said, rising and taking up the things she had flung on the chair when she came in. "I think I'll say good night." She came over, and kissed first her brother, and then Mrs. Douglas, and stole off to her room, leaving Archie and his mother together.

When they were alone Mrs. Douglas drew

close to her son, and laid her hand on his shoulder.

"What would you give me for a great piece of news, Archie?" she asked.

"Well there is not much news about Stedleigh that I don't know," he said. "Is it anything my father is going to do?"

"No, but something Marion is going to do. What would you say if you heard she is engaged to Harry Osborne?"

"Well not much," Archie answered thoughtfully, "I expected it, for I was in Harry's confidence of course. But what will my father say? that's the question. By Jove, I think we'll have a row."

"Why should he object? Harry is a capital match, and Marion must marry some time. I only wonder she did not do so long ago."

The sound of carriage wheels coming up the avenue gave notice of the return of Mr. Douglas, who had been dining with a friend at some distance from Stedleigh, Archie rose to leave.

"Well if there be a regular stand up fight you will back Marion, mother," he said with

a smile, "as you'll back me when my time comes."

"Nonsense Archie, don't talk that way, Marion will need no backing, and you must not be foolish," and involuntarily her eye turned towards the figure on the vase.

Archie laughed, and kissing his mother, left the room just as his father's step was heard ascending the stairs.

## CHAPTER IV.

## A POACHER'S DEATH-BED.

STEDLEIGH was not one of those ill-regulated mansions where Liberty Hall rules are predominant, and people follow their own whims with pleasant freedom. At Stedleigh every one did, not as they chose themselves, but as its master chose. Mr. Douglas was master of the house, and he was literally at the head, aye, and at the foot too, of everything, except the housekeeping. He had the grace not to interfere with that; but in all other things he reigned supreme.

The master's eye was everywhere, nothing escaped his vigilance. There was no chance

of careless stewards dipping their fingers into the Stedleigh coffers, or careless tenants getting in arrear with the Stedleigh rents. Yet Mr. Douglas was not a bad landlord, and allowed liberally for improvements. No tenant was discouraged, or kept down by the fear of a dropping lease being taken advantage of, to turn him out of the well-cared-for farm, which his enterprise and outlay had made more valuable. To such men Mr. Douglas always acted fairly and honourably. He liked to keep them on his estate, and his good sense and justice told by his property rising in value. Let his tenants only pay their rent to the day and all would go well, but arrears was a word Mr. Douglas had never learned to spell. So it came to pass while every one respected him no one loved him. Yet he was neither unjust nor ungenerous. The rector, Mr. Clifford, found no difficulty in getting him to subscribe to clothing funds, and coal funds. He came heartily forward to support a movement for building a working man's hall and reading room. Such of the local charities as met with his approbation, met with his aid likewise, but

beggars he disapproved of utterly. They were vagrants, and he set his face against them; they knew it too, and wisely avoided Stedleigh. Its smooth turf was never pressed by the foot of the wandering mendicant. The deer slumbering in its great park never had to rise and fly through the trees at their approach; they knew well enough there were such things as vagrant laws, and trespass laws, and that Mr. Douglas was a magistrate. He had enforced the lesson once or twice, and it never had to be repeated. Even daring poachers held the 'Stedleigh woods in awe. The Stedleigh hares skipped through the heath on the hill behind yonder wood, unmolested except by its owner and his friends.

They had not always had such peaceful times however. Some two years ago Mr. Douglas' keepers cast aside their vigilance, and in consequence hares and pheasants, snipe and woodcocks grew scarce in Stedleigh Manor. Suspecting something, Mr. Douglas sallied one night into the wood with a gun, and woke its slumbering echoes by three or four loud shots, but not its slumbering guardians. The



next morning the entire regiment of keepers was disbanded. Not a word of defence, not a word of explanation, would he listen to. This was his notion of strict justice. He had trusted the men as long as they were fit to be trusted, and when they were not he dismissed them. New keepers were appointed, on whom the abrupt discharge of the others acted as a warning, and the game had peace. Henceforth the purple heather would hide no treacherous trap. The darting hares, if they met death, would meet it through the muzzle of a gun, in broad day-light, instead of being ignominiously caught by the leg, as they went skipping along unsuspectingly.

The new keepers full of fresh zeal, went poking about here and there in search of poachers' tracks, and plenty of them they found. The twisted wire traps told their own tale. By Mr. Douglas' orders they left the traps there awhile, and watched, but the poachers who were as wide awake as they were, never came. For a whole year Mr. Douglas' mind ran on discovering those poachers. At the end of the year he found them.

Adjoining Stedleigh was the estate of a Mr. Hamilton ; on Mr. Hamilton's grounds two poachers were pounced upon by a keeper. A struggle ensued, the keeper was knocked down and the men fled. Only momentarily stunned by the blow, the enraged keeper sprang to his feet, raised his gun and fired. One of the men fell.

To this man's bed-side wounded and dying, Mr. Douglas was called as a magistrate to take his deposition, Mr. Hamilton being from home.

It was a murky dark night, with the lead coloured clouds full of threatening snow as the stout old magistrate made his way to the keeper's lodge, where the wounded poacher lay a-dying. Two policemen, the keeper and Mr. Douglas nearly filled the narrow room. A chair was procured for the latter, a table, pen, ink and paper were placed before him, and he sat down to listen to the man's tale ; told huskily and at intervals.

A poacher from his boyhood, therefore, an Ishmaelite from his youth upwards, the man had no right idea of religion, but he held a

kind of superstitious hope, that confession at the eleventh hour would lessen the weight of the load he had to carry whither he was going now. He knew that there was a God who had made the green woods, where he slept in the sun in the summer time, in whose leafy shades many a pheasant fell his victim. He knew that the same God made the streams, where he speared the trout. Beyond this, and a notion that the birds and fish were made for his use, as well as the woods and streams, his creed did not go; and now he lay dying, dribbling out in gasping sentences such words as fully exculpated the keeper, who fired the fatal shot, from any blame in the matter of his death, mingling it all with admissions and regrets, for his own long life of law breaking.

"You poached in Stedleigh wood, did you not?" Mr. Douglas inquired.

"Yes, yes, and you be Mr. Douglas," the man answered slowly.

"Yes, I am Mr. Douglas, but I cannot harm you now, and you may as well say who poached with you in Stedleigh. You did not fix all those traps alone."

"No I did not, some nights Tom was with me."

"Who is Tom?" but the man had closed his eyes and made no answer. "Who is Tom?" Mr. Douglas asked of the police sergeant. "Is he his son?"

"No sir, he has no son," the sergeant answered raising his head off the paper where with true police instinct, he had been putting down the man's wandering half connected statement.

"Who is Tom, my friend?" Mr. Douglas asked again, very gently, close to the poacher's ear.

"He lives away behind the wood, on the hill side," he said faintly, and relapsed into silence.

That would not do. There were several Toms living on the hill side. Some of the land was his, and some was Mr. Hamilton's. Who did this Tom live under?

"Is he a tenant of mine?" was the next question.

A pause, but no reply. Mr. Douglas repeated it, and the man said "Yes," but

whether he knew what he said or not was doubtful.

"Have you that down, sergeant?" Mr. Douglas asked, in a low, fixed tone.

"Yes, sir."

A suspicion was on Mr. Douglas's mind, and turning to the dying poacher, he touched his arm, so as to rouse him from his lethargy, and then put a leading question.

"Was it Tom Williams?"

"What?" the man said, drowsily.

He seemed to have forgotten the drift of what he had been talking of.

"Was it Tom Williams that went poaching with you in Stedleigh?"

He looked down into the man's face, waiting his reply. "If he says yes to that I have him," he thought; but, with a last glimmering effort of sense, the man closed his eyes, muttering indistinctly that he would not "peach" on any one.

Mr. Douglas sat back in his chair foiled.

There is no use leaning over the inanimate body—no use catching his hand and bidding him sign the heap of garbled nonsense the

police sergeant has been so busy scribbling the past hour. The man was dead ; there lay the incomplete statement unsigned, and there was nothing left to Mr. Douglas but to go home with only clue enough to satisfy himself, but not enough to punish the offender.

The snow had come down heavily during the night, and lay white upon the hill side the following morning, as Mr. Douglas facing the cutting mountain blast that blew right against him, went up the path leading to old Williams's house. Williams himself was at home ; he was a decrepit man, and sat in the chimney corner, leaning on a stick. His two sons were out about the farm somewhere, and there was no one in save the old man and his wife, a smart, cleanly woman, very many years younger than her husband.

"Do not let me disturb you, Williams," Mr. Douglas said, as the woman rose and curtsied, and her husband tried to get up, in honour of his landlord. "My business is with your son, not with you."

The old man touched his cap, which he

always wore, even in the house, and muttered something inaudible.

"His memory is nearly gone, sir," Mrs. Williams observed. "He was an old man when I married him, and that is seven and twenty years ago now."

"Where is Tom?" Mr. Douglas asked, in his direct way, without noticing Mrs. Williams's little reminiscence.

"He is about the farm-yard somewhere, sir."

She went to the door and called him; he came at his mother's voice, and Mr. Douglas crossed the yard to meet him.

Williams was a tall, straight, stalwart man, of about six-and-twenty, with a handsome sunburnt face, a quantity of light hair and whisker, and a straightforward, honest blue eye, very unlike the eye one would expect to find in a poacher. As he met Mr. Douglas he touched his cap.

"Have you heard any news this morning, Williams?" Mr. Douglas inquired, by way of firing the first shot.

"Not any news—as you would call news,

sir," Williams answered, warily ; " I only heard that Will Davis was dead."

"That is the news I allude to. I was with Davis up to the last moment, and took his dying depositions. I am sorry to say, Williams, that he not only owned to being one of the Stedleigh poachers, but implicated you as his accomplice."

This might not have been a bad hit of Mr. Douglas's, only it happened his companion was as wise as himself, having been down that morning at the keeper's lodge, where he had heard every word about the incomplete depositions, as well as that Davis had not actually mentioned his name.

"Oh, aye, sir. No doubt he was raving," Williams answered, quite coolly. "But are you sure he named me?" he added, with a sudden, searching eye, on Mr. Douglas's face.

"Well, no ; but he marked you out otherwise."

"It won't do, Mr. Douglas," the young man said, his face reddening with anger : "and it ain't fair of you to come here to trap me, even suppose I was a poacher. When



you can prove anything, come for me, but don't try to hang a man out of his own mouth."

"I have come to warn you, Williams—only to warn you," Mr. Douglas said, "to have nothing to do with my game. If you have, your father being my tenant won't save you, so look to yourself."

Williams smiled, as if half to himself, but he said nothing.

"A person told me this morning," Mr. Douglas went on, "that he saw you going along with a hare over your shoulder, three months ago, so you had best take care."

"So had more than me, sir," Williams said, crossing his brawny arms on his chest, "if I catch them talking. As if people carry poached hares in the open day over their shoulder. I remember that hare well; I bought it down in Stedleigh; I don't doubt but my mother has its skin yet. Would you know the skin of one of your own hares, Mr. Douglas?"

"I don't want any more talk with you, Williams," Mr. Douglas said, in a hard, dry

tone, peculiar to him when displeased. "But recollect this, and I shall live to prove it to you. I will have no poachers living on my land."

He opened the yard gate, and went out down along the hill-side path. Williams stood above watching him.

"I wish you were a good cock grouse, and I would have a shot at you ; that would stop you crowing, I can tell you," he muttered, as he turned away.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE ADMIRAL AND HIS SON.

ADMIRAL OSBORNE and Harry sat together after dinner, in the dining-room at the Cliff, the windows of which looked out towards the sea. It was the only view the Admiral thought worth studying. His eyes had been accustomed to the sight of it since boyhood, when he had gone on board the "Neptune" for the first time, in full midshipman's rig, blue coat, gilt buttons, and a cap with an anchor in front.

It had been a grand day, that first one of the Admiral's sea life, when, having been brought on board in the Captain's boat, in

company with the Captain himself, who had been an old friend of his father's, he was introduced in full form to the officers of the ship, and stood smiling and colouring in the midst of a whole circle of blue coats.

From that day life began in earnest for the young middy. He had to fight his way through the "youngsters," who were ready enough to quiz the greenhorn; but our Admiral was a stout young fellow enough then, though he is but a feeble old man now, and he pretty soon placed himself on a level with his fellows.

Where are all those light-hearted young middies now? Some of them are spinning their yarns round household fires yet, like our friend the Admiral; some of them fell fighting the French, and others—well, no matter,—they are nearly all gone somehow or other, and as they do not concern our story, we cannot wait to search them out. The Admiral himself remains to us, and with the Admiral alone we have to do.

He and Harry, as I have said, sat alone after dinner enjoying their wine. It was

good old port, such as Mr. Clifford the Rector of Stedleigh would have smacked his lips unctiously over, and as soon as the servants left the room the Admiral turned his attention to the enjoyment of it, and have a talk with his son. He filled his glass afresh, pushed the decanter to Harry, then turning his chair sideways to the table, crossed one leg over the other, and stretched them both out comfortably. Then, taking up his glass, he looked steadily at it with his left eye shut, and being pleased with the wine, he finally put it to his lips, and drained it with a satisfied air.

Harry sat with his elbow on the table, sipping his wine meditatively.

"A nice business the smash up of that ship was," the Admiral said after awhile, seeing that Harry never spoke. "It was no joke in my day losing a vessel, but now—" the sentence was interrupted by his filling his glass again, and emptying it. Harry was rather tired of the subject; his father had been at it all dinner-time, and now he was dragging it up again.

"You knew the Captain, I think?" he

said, by way of saying something in reply.

"Knew him? aye, I met him at Portsmouth, on board that very ship, and dined with him. A stuck up fellow he is, too; conceited and self-sufficient—just the man to do mischief, and he has done it, with a vengeance. That is what comes of pushing young men up into the service before they have experience. The whole navy is going to the dogs. It is not what it used to be."

"Things were different in your days I suppose, sir?" Harry answered, with a pre-occupied manner, again lazily sipping his wine, and staring at the empty fireplace.

"I should rather think so. I would like to have seen Compton, the first Captain I sailed under, or myself, when I got a ship, smashing her to pieces on a coral reef like this fellow Grimshaw."

"Aye, but if Captain Grimshaw did not know of the coral reef, what then?"

"If he did not know, he should have known. Where was his chart?"

"Yes, but if it were not marked upon the

chart?" Harry answered, for very contradiction sake, fighting Captain Grimshaw's battle because he was tired of the ship and the coral reef.

"If, if—you are as bad as the man in the play, Harry; but I will give you this if. If Grimshaw had not run her upon the reef he must have run her upon something else; he is not the man to have a ship long without damaging her. I said that to Admiral Stacey ten years ago, and I have lived to see that I was right."

"The time you saw him at the Cape?"

"Nonsense, Harry; it is twenty-five years since I was at the Cape—Grimshaw was not in the service then, I met him at Portsmouth long after I left the navy. He was first lieutenant that time. I was dining with the captain, and happened to sit near him at dinner. How the fellow talked, to be sure! such an opinion as he had of himself. Fancy him setting up his notions as to what should be and what should not be in navy regulations, in the face of men that were at sea before he was born. Aye, but the best of it was," and

the Admiral laid his hand on the table, and faced round to Harry. "The best of it was, when the wine began to work he went right mad, and told us how he would have acted at Copenhagen had he been Nelson. Well, by Jove! he has done now what Nelson never did, for he has run his ship on a coral reef."

The Admiral laughed so hearty at his joke, that Harry was infected with his mirth, and laughed too.

"Here, fill your glass, and drink God save the Queen, and may He keep the navy free of such Nelsons as Grimshawe."

The Admiral drank his toast with a will. For several years ago this same Grimshawe had talked down and opposed some of the old man's pet opinions, covertly laughing at him the while, but now the laugh was on the Admiral's side, and I am afraid, good old soul as he was, he enjoyed his opportunity. When the Admiral's laugh was done he looked at his son. Harry sat with his first glass of wine unfinished yet, and his eyes riveted on the grate. "What ails the boy?" the Admiral thought, forgetting Captain Grimshaw.



Those two usually had a cosy chat every day after dinner, but that day the weight of the conversation had fallen on the Admiral. Harry had been silent and distrait; he had something to tell his father,—something the old man would be glad to hear. He knew it would sound pleasantly in his sister's ears, too, yet there he sat by the table, lacking courage to speak. What fools men are at times; the wisest and the greatest of them can look back on some especial day when they made an ass of themselves. Perhaps they laugh when they remember it, but they did not laugh at the moment, believe me, no more than Harry Osborne laughed at what he had to tell his father.

Now, the whole head and front of Harry's difficulty lay, first in his being in love, and next in his having asked the lady to be his wife, a very common sequence to such a beginning. It may be very well to smile at him, but I can tell you a young man does feel like a sheep when he comes before his elders with such a tale in his mouth. And like a sheep Harry felt that instant aa, with one

hand on his glass and the other in his pocket, he sat staring into the grate, until the Admiral put his thoughts into words, and asked him what was the matter?

"Nothing father," he said, rousing himself and raising his head; "I was just thinking of a little affair I wanted to mention to you, that's all."

"What is it, my boy? Don't be frightened, I will not deny you anything you ask in reason."

Harry laughed; he was beginning to wax courageous, and thought he had best have it over, so he plunged into the subject at once.

"I am going to give you a daughter-in-law," he said; "that is, if you don't object."

"Ha, you think you have stolen a march on me, Harry; you kept it very close, but close as you kept it I guessed it, although I am a stupid old fellow. Marion Douglas, is it not?"

"Yes, Marion. I have been thinking of her this long while," he said, with the blood

hot in his face; "although I kept it close, as you say."

The Admiral held out his hand.

"Let us shake hands over it, Harry; you could not have pleased me better. As to Marion Douglas, I always liked her, and it would be a strange thing if I could not find a place in my heart for your wife, Harry."

They shook hands warmly. "How silly you thought you did it," said the Admiral laughing. "You young fellows are cunning rascals. But what did Marion say? — Yes, of course."

"No, not exactly," Harry answered, hesitatingly.

"She would think of it, I suppose—was that it? Oh, well, never mind, when women don't say a stiff 'no,' they mean yes; and it takes a very stiff one, I can tell you, to mean no. I have had some experience, having sailed after such craft once or twice." And the old man laughed again at the remembrance of his days of love-making.

"But Marion did not say no at all, father,"

Harry answered; "she only seemed to have a hesitation about her father."

"Oh, aye, women always hesitate about something. It's a little crooked way they have, and they can't help it," the Admiral said, in a tone that seemed to compassionate feminine weakness. "You think you have them up to the point, when they start off on a new tack. It just means, I'll run, but do you follow, and I'll let you catch me presently."

Again the Admiral laughed joyously, Harry joining in his mirth. Miss Osborne heard them in the drawing-room just across the hall, and wondered what the merriment was about.

Presently the laughing ceased, and Harry became the speaker, while his father leant his head on his hand and listened. He touched lightly on what had passed between him and Marion a little before we saw them crossing Stedleigh lawn, dwelling most on Marion's wish that her father's consent should be had before she gave a definite promise. Once or twice the old man said "Humph!" by way of

showing he was attending, but Harry's voice going on and on, was putting him to sleep. It was the hour for his usual nap, and in spite of himself he felt his eyes closing. What would Harry say when he found his listener asleep? It is very hard to keep awake listening to other people's love-stories; very hard, as I dare say all of us have found when our friends have taken us into their confidence at bed-hour, or during the time of the twilight doze we are given to indulge in; and so it came to pass, the Admiral fell asleep with his head upon his hand; and, worse than that, snored at the most important part of the whole thing, just as Harry was asking him to go to Mr. Douglas on his behalf, and arrange everything about this marriage. To snore at such a time was worse than heresy, and Harry stopped disappointed. But the snore was so loud that it awoke the Admiral.

"Harry, my boy, I could not help it; I have been asleep, I think," he said apologetically, stretching his legs and arms to rouse himself. "Here, come, let us go to Char-

lotte and get some coffee, it will keep us awake."

Miss Osborne had rung for the coffee a little before, and the servant had just placed it before her, and was leaving the room, as Harry and his father entered. She sat at the table with her hand busy amongst the cups and spoons.

"You got tired waiting for us; Charlotte," her father said, going towards the table, and taking a seat near her; "come, give me a good cup of coffee, and I will give you some news."

Harry came over fearlessly; the worst of it was passed, and he was pretty sure of his sister's approval.

"What news?" she asked quietly, for Miss Osborne was sparing of her words and sparing of her wonder. She was a stiff, silent woman, dark-haired and sallow, loving few people, yet warm in her love for those few, despite her chill exterior. "Had Charlotte ever had a lover?" Harry would sometimes ask himself. She did not look like a woman a man would

love, he thought in his silent criticism. Whatever may have been in the past, she was an undemonstrative woman now, not easily roused to wonder or curiosity, so she met her father's smiling promise with her calm question of "What news?"

"News of a wedding?" he said cheerfully; "guess whose it is."

"I am a bad guesser—not Grace Clifford's?"

"Nonsense, Charlotte! Grace has no lover that I know of. But suppose Grace's father had been up to propose to me for you, what would you think?" he asked with sudden seriousness.

Now if there was one man in Stedleigh Miss Osborne disliked more than another it was Mr. Clifford. She disliked his talking, his broad mirth, the hearty ring of his voice, so pleasant to other people, was most unpleasant to her; and although she knew well enough this proposal was only a sportive notion of the Admiral's, a joke in which he had indulged in before, she did not like it,

and shook her head in token of disapproval, at the same time darting a rebuking glance at Harry because he laughed.

"You don't believe about Mr. Clifford, Charlotte eh!" the admiral said. "Well come, another cup of coffee and here is my news. Harry, there, is going to bring you a sister-in-law in Marion Douglas."

Miss Osborne laid down the cup she had in her hand.

"I am very glad to hear it," she said, with more emphasis than was usual to her. "Very glad of it, for I like Marion Douglas better than most people."

"Not better than Archie."

"No, not better than Archie," she said, as she poured out the coffee, and then looking over at Harry, continued, "I need not say I wish you joy Harry; you have done the very thing I have been wishing and waiting for these many months. But what does Mr. Douglas say?"

"He does not know it yet," Harry answered, playing with his teaspoon, "I want my father



to see him, I was telling him so in the dining room, but—”

“Never mind,” the admiral interrupted, “I fell asleep. However I will be awake tomorrow, and board him at Stedleigh.”

## CHAPTER VI.

## NABOTH'S VINEYARD.

THE library at Stedleigh was on the left hand side of the great hall, behind the dining-room. It looked out on a broad green strip of turf skirted by trees, which scattered and thin at first, grew gradually denser, till they led you away into the wood, and thence up the hill side.

Suppose you were minded to take a long walk in the warm summer mornings, no path you could choose would offer more attraction than the hill in question, with the cool air creeping over its face, and lifting the night mist away. Nor was any sight more grand

to see, than the sun rising as you stood on its summit, and watched it burst on the valley and the wood below.

But the sun has been long up now, for it is already noonday. Its garish beams are excluded by the drawn blinds from pouring in through the bay windows of the library at Stedleigh, lest they should dazzle Mr. Douglas, who sits at a circular table poring over a large map. Upon the ground by his side there is a painted tin case of a chocolate colour, the lid of which is open. A heap of papers just taken from it lies on the table by the map.

These papers are made up of old musty letters, and two or three leases or deeds, all brown with age, creased and cracked where the folds are. From time to time pieces of new parchment have been neatly pasted at the back, across the damaged spots, so as to give firmness to the crumbling parchment. Mr. Douglas leant back in his easy chair, looking with a restless wandering eye, now at the great open map, and now at the open deeds that lay sere and yellow by its

side, and fell a thinking. Was he wondering where the hand was that traced those strange grotesque characters over it, many a year before he was born? or was he thinking of something very different; most likely the latter? for Mr. Douglas's mind was not one of those non-practical brains like yours or mine perhaps, that goes riding away on hobby horses. Yet Mr. Douglas had his hobby, though he did not know it, or perhaps it was too earnest to be called a hobby. It was rather an old cherished purpose, a longing for that which he had not, and an undying desire to have it, although like many other longings, it was not worth the thought it gave, or the cost it was yet to bring him. He leant back in his chair awhile thinking. Presently bending forward again, he laid his hand on one of the deeds, began reading, tracing with his fingers every line as he went along, and muttering the words as he read them.

It was an ancient deed of marriage, between one Archibald Douglas, an ancestor of Mr. Douglas, and a Janet Mackenzie, by which certain lands were settled on her for life, and

manhood far from dead yet, Mr. Douglas felt himself quite juvenile beside the worn out old veteran ; and when the Admiral held out his snuffbox, which he always produced as soon as he was settled in any new place, Mr. Douglas cautiously inserted his finger and thumb, and helping himself to some, conveyed it slowly to his nose. It so happened that Mr. Douglas never snuffed, but he always took the Admiral's offered civility in a kind of half humorous patronising spirit, as one indulges the whim of the aged, or the fancies of an invalid ; and slyly sniffing, as if imbibing what he took care, by keeping his fingers tightly closed, should not escape, he presently contrived to drop the unwelcome brown dust without being seen. This little pantomime was acted over and over again as often as those two met, without Mr. Douglas ever having taken snuff, or the unsuspecting old admiral ever having known that he did not.

Now the Admiral had come as we know on very special business to Stedleigh that morning, but instead of beginning it in a regular off-hand fashion as a bluff old seaman might be

expected to do, he began talking about the weather: "How hot it was." "Yes, it was hot, no doubt it was," Mr. Douglas assented, while he wished the Admiral back at the Cliff, that he might go on with his papers and his map. The Admiral had recourse to his snuff box again, and then he inquired if there were any news stirring.

"Not a word except that I have lost one of my tenants, old Williams on the hill is dead."

"Poor fellow, he is another gone before me, I suppose his son Tom will get the farm."

Mr. Douglas closed his mouth for a moment, while the hard resolute lines which we have observed in a lesser degree in his son, gathered round it.

"The land falls in, it is out of lease," he said.

"Of course I know, but young Williams will be glad to have it."

"I dare say," Mr. Douglas answered dryly, and then he added, "I should have asked you before, Admiral, how Miss Osborne is, and Harry?"

"Charlotte is very well, and so is Harry; indeed it was about him I came to speak to

you. He has taken something in his head, and I want to see what you think of it."

"Not to go for a cruise I hope," Mr. Douglas said, more because such a project would pain his father than from disapprobation of it.

"No, not so bad as that. I keep him off the sea as much as possible. The Queen should have had him if the others had been spared; but two sons are enough to give my country; I could not bear to lose this last."

A pained look came over the old man's forehead, and a tear trembled in his eye. The weakness that we press back in youth comes welling up despite us, in the feebleness of age.

"Well, but what is Harry about if not on for the sea?" Mr. Douglas asked, without seeming to notice the old man's quivering lip; and perhaps it was the wisest course, for it brought him straight up to the point.

"Thinking of getting a wife, the young fool, like his father, who was a fool before him—"

"Well, I have been a fool twice," Mr. Douglas said, with a touch of grim mirth. "But who is he thinking of?" and the master of Stedleigh turned over in his mind all the likely young ladies in the neighbourhood outside Stedleigh itself, consequently he never guessed the right one.

"He is doing something wise I hope, Admiral. Money, eh?"

"Well, yes, money; although the money has nothing to do with it."

"Oh, dear no—of course not; still, it's a good thing for a girl to have, you know," Mr. Douglas answered, drawing in discreetly, for his mind ran off to the bygone days when he had married Mary Westbrooke, and Stedleigh Manor at the same time, and thought that it had not been a bad morning's work, all done and over before twelve o'clock, with the rest of the day left for self-gratulation. Then, rousing himself from his thoughts, he asked the Admiral who the lady was.

"Well, I wonder you did not guess what brought Harry here so often.—Your daughter."



"My daughter ! What, Marion ?" Mr. Douglas exclaimed in amazement. And then he leant back against his chair, and pondered.

There is an old fairy tale, which tells of a young prince whose fairy godmother prophesied would come to some great trouble if he ever heard the word "love," and the king, his father, out of pure affection, to keep him from this terrible temptation, built a tower in a forest, and kept his son there alone, with a slave whom he could trust, who was not to name the objectionable verb in his presence. So it came to pass that the prince grew up to manhood without seeing a woman's face, or hearing there was such a thing as love. But by-and-by, in some wonderful way, only known in fairy lore, which I did not question then, and which you must not question now, the young prince beguiled his captivity by learning the language of the birds that sung about him all the long summer days ; and through the cooing of the doves, and the twittering and warbling of the songsters that sat upon the boughs, the refrain was still the same—

"love, love, love!" the only word in all they said of which he did not know the meaning. "What was it?" the prince asked his slave, who trembled, but dare not answer. "What was it?" he asked his father when they met, and the father turned pale. But the spell was broken, and the trouble came I suppose. However, the prince got out of durance, and that was something.

Now the fatal word had come to Stedleigh, and Mr. Douglas was astonished. Marion had been through the Stedleigh wood and park with Harry Osborne, and heard the birds sing, but, unlike the prince in my fairy tale, she did not need to ask her father what the note meant, for Harry Osborne had been her interpreter.

"Marion and Harry Osborne!" It was a new idea to Mr. Douglas, and he sat thinking of it long. The Admiral did not interrupt him, he knew it was his habit to consider well before he spoke, and he gave him his own time.

Some years ago, when Marion was very young, Mr. Douglas had given himself some

thought about her marriage, but as time passed away, and her very early girlish days with it, he began to lose sight of it, and sometimes found himself speculating on what might be if she never married. She was in her twenty-fourth year, a time of life that, under ordinary circumstances, a girl of her wealth would never have reached without being married; and with every passing season Mr. Douglas began to feel the notion coming upon him, that she would remain Marion Douglas to the end of her life. If so, what then? Why, she was sole heiress of Stedleigh. Once she came of age, she could will the entire property to whom she pleased, and who so likely to get it as Archie, whom she dearly loved? Twenty-four this year, twenty-five next. It would not be long until she was thirty, and after thirty women of Marion's nature grow cold, and begin to run fast down the vale of life. Now all these visions were at an end. Harry Osborne had come to dispel them, and the worst of it was, he could make no reasonable objection to the match. There was the fact, and he must face it.

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There sat Harry's father, too, and he must speak to him.

"This has taken me very much by surprise, Admiral. What does Marion say? Has Harry spoken to her?" Mr. Douglas said at last, looking round at his visitor, resolutely shutting up his own opinion for the present.

"She would give no decided reply until she knew what you would say. She is very well inclined towards Harry, but she would not give a promise until I spoke to you."

"Very right," Mr. Douglas said, approvingly. "I am certainly the proper person to consult first."

He forgot that in his own wooing days he had got poor Mary Westbrooke's consent before her father knew a word of it. But that was a long time ago, and people's memories fail them.

"I think so too, Douglas," Admiral Osborne answered; "therefore I came to you direct, and now tell me what you think."

"As far as Harry himself goes, nothing could be better, I am sure, for Marion's hap-

piness ; but there are many things besides to be thought of."

"Of course there are, my friend—of course there are," the Admiral assented, trying to follow the mind of the cautious Scot. "Stedleigh, for instance, is Marion's, you would say on your part, while I—"

"Not so fast, Admiral—Stedleigh is *not* Marion's as long as I live. At my death it is hers, and until then, if she marries, she has five hundred a year out of the rents."

It was very little for the heiress of such a property as that. Clearly the wily Caledonian had done as he pleased with old Mr. Westbrooke and his daughter in the matter of settlements. However, the Admiral said nothing on that point.

"Of course I knew you had the life use of the place," he answered. "That is not of any consequence. Ultimately it will be Marion's, for old people like you and me must move off the scene sooner or later, to make way for others."

"Yes, yes, of course," Mr. Douglas said, testily, for, to say truth, he did not like being

classed with the feeble old man beside him, who seemed a generation in advance, and made him forget those five years, and look upon them as twenty.

There was a pause, during which the Admiral applied to his snuff-box; and then, turning round in his chair, he faced Mr. Douglas.

"This matter, as between Marion and my son, is one of affection, but, between you and me, it is a dry matter of business." He paused; Mr. Douglas nodded. "It stands thus: Marion is heiress of Stedleigh, while Harry, at his uncle George's death, comes in for the title and estates. Don't you see, Douglas, it is nearly the same as if Sir George Osborne's eldest son sought your daughter."

"Nearly the same, but not quite," Mr. Douglas said, coldly. "Remember, you stand between Harry and his prospects, which you could not do if he were your brother's son."

"Tut, tut! an old man like me, within a year or two of being as old as Sir George himself. I will not long stand in anybody's way."

"My dear friend, I should be sorry to mean that you were in the way either of your own son or my daughter. What I meant was, that if Sir George lived, and you lived, they might be long enough without much more than the means to live. Five hundred a year is nothing."

"I have more to say than that, Douglas. You give Marion five hundred a year, and I, on my part, give Harry the half of sixty thousand pounds I have in the three per cents. The other half I keep for Charlotte; poor girl, I must take care of her."

"Poor girl!" he forgot that Charlotte was a woman twenty years ago, and that time had not stood still with her since.

Mr. Douglas fell a thinking; the offer was unexceptionable; there was nothing to be said against it.

"You will give me time to consider this, Admiral?" he observed, after a little.

"Certainly; and now I shall be off; I have taken all your morning from you."

So they shook hands and parted, the Admiral driving home to the Cliff, while Mr.

Douglas resumed his interrupted survey of the map.

There he sits by the table, cogitating what the Admiral has been saying, until his attention is gradually drawn off from the subject as his finger goes wandering over the blue and yellow spots before him, until it reaches the red patch in the distant corner, where it rests lingeringly.

Looking at that poor daub, whose blood-red hue rivets his eye, he forgets Stedleigh in all its fair beauty. Forgets that which he has, in that which he has not. What were Ahab's great possessions to him, lacking Naboth's vineyard?



## CHAPTER VII.

IN WHICH GRACE CLIFFORD AND FREDERICK  
OSBORNE ARE INTRODUCED TO THE READER.

THE sun dipped away through the leafy shades of Stedleigh wood, glittered on the shingly beach, and threw its shadows over the broad rock where Admiral Osborne's house was perched, with its wide front looking seaward.

In one of the drawing-room windows Marion Douglas sat with Miss Osborne. The two ladies were bending over a piece of crochet work, the intricacies of which Marion was explaining to her friend, and thinking of Harry all the while.

Mr. Douglas had given his assent to his

daughter's marriage with Harry. It had taken some days consideration before he came to this decision. He was not particularly anxious that Marion should marry at all. On the contrary, he was particularly anxious that she should not ; but Harry Osborne's offer was one so entirely unexceptionable, that the astute master of Stedleigh was obliged to admit to himself that he could find no hook on which to hang an objection. Having so admitted, his next step was to announce it to the Admiral.

Marion's was one of those wise choices, that brings no difficulties into families, and saves the story-teller, as well as all other parties concerned, a vast deal of trouble in the way of getting up runaways, or secret meetings, all of which are subject to interruption by stormy fathers, or watchful mothers. Marion's choice put her beyond the reach of these delightful excitements, and, indeed, I fear she would have been a sorry hand at disobedience, if disobedience had been necessary. She was not of the stuff that is made to row against the tide. It was far pleasanter for her to sit

still and drift as she was drifting now, with her thoughts running on Harry Osborne, and her eye occasionally wandering from her work to the sea in search of the boat in which her lover had pushed off an hour before.

The other window was the Admiral's special property. There his glass was fixed on a frame, so that he could wheel it round according as it suited him. Near his great arm-chair was placed a small table, on which lay the latest copy of the navy list, some books containing accounts of naval engagements, Nelson's life, and a few numbers of the Naval and Military Gazette. Amongst the treasures that suited his peculiar taste, the good old Admiral used to sit in the evenings, with the windows thrown open, so that he could smell the sea.

On this particular evening the Admiral sat in his usual place, looking at the gleaming sails go shooting by, and listening to the murmur of the sea, as the waves came in softly, and broke with a low, swishing sound on the shingles. A pretty, bright-eyed girl, with a soft rich hue in her cheek, and hair of

that shade of brown that has a glinting ripple in the sun, sat on a low stool by his side, looking up now at the grand white head of the old man, and again out on the ocean.

"How quiet everything is to-night," she said; "the waves are coming in so peacefully, one forgets there are such things as storms. Listen!" A wave came creeping in, and broke on the beach. "Would you not think it said h-u-s-h?" and she drew out the word long, to imitate the sound. "There it is again, h-u-s-h!"

"They are the mermaids. You'll hear them singing presently," the Admiral answered smiling; "only I hope they will not lure my boy on to the rocks."

"They are a long time coming."

"Who, the mermaids?" the Admiral asked with mock gravity.

"No, but your son and Archie Douglas. While we are waiting for them will you tell me a sea story."

"I do believe you came over for a sea story Grace; but you have run out all my yarns."

"Then give me an old one over again?"

It was the ancient nursery way of settling a thing. Mother or nurse run a ground in fairy tales, and an old one begged for once again and again. A sea story, what should it be? But, the Admiral's tale was destined not to be told that evening at least, for Grace happening to glance out of the window spied Harry Osborne's boat skimming over the water and making right for the Cliff.

"There they are," she cried rising and pointing with her finger towards the vessel.

"Where child, where?" and the Admiral's glass was turned in the direction she indicated.

There they were truly, Harry Osborne, his cousin Frederick who was staying at the Cliff, and Archibald Douglas. As the little vessel came nearer they could see the young men lounging on deck smoking their cigars, and as she swept in, Grace and the admiral leant forward out of the window to watch her. Miss Osborne and Marion bent out likewise, the gentlemen caught a glimpse of them and raised their caps. Then the boat was fastened to her moorings, and the party began climbing the cliff.

"Come out and meet them, Marion," Miss Osborne suggested. "Harry would like it."

Marion assented. She would not have ventured to make the proposition herself, but her heart thanked Miss Osborne. Meanwhile the gentlemen were coming up the cliff and as they mounted the steps cut in the rock's face, Fred with pardonable curiosity enquired who the ladies were.

"The one in the window with Charlotte is Miss Douglas of Stedleigh," Harry answered; "the other is my father's great friend and favourite, Miss Clifford, our rector's daughter."

"Clifford! high sounding rather; what goes before? Geraldine or Gertrude, Annabel or Josephine?" Fred asked with a laugh in which a sneer lay.

"None of them," Harry replied. "They call her Grace."

"Grace! what a presumptuous name for a woman, unless she is suited for it. I remember seeing a lady once whose name was Grace, with rotundity enough to fit her for an alderman's wife."

"But this one just suits the name as the name suits her. Take care, Fred, that you are not in love with her in a month."

"Likely, I am a very soft fish, Harry."

Douglas never spoke, but came along with a red flush on his face, that told he was at some pains to keep his hot mixed blood down. Harry had reached the top of the cliff, and met his sister and Marion Douglas coming down towards the rock path. Frederick Osborne followed and was introduced to Miss Douglas, then Archibald came up, and they turned back towards the house. Marion and the two Osbornes before, Miss Osborne, and Douglas bringing up the rear.

"Your flowers are still in bloom, I see Miss Osborne," Archie observed as he went along. He must say something, so he made a dash at the flowers. She stopped before the flower-beds, and then sauntered through them, keeping fast hold of Douglas.

"I have made a tolerable garden in this barren place, and I am rather proud of it; but what a pity the season is so nearly over, winter will be here immediately."

"Winter is not a bad time," he said. "I shall have lots of hunting in winter."

Douglas could not see with Miss Osborne's eyes, he did not care about the flowers dying, but he cared very much for the hunting. He looked at the drawing-room window, and felt sulky. In one Marion and Harry leant against the curtains talking, he did not care about that, but in the other Frederick Osborne stood with the Admiral and Grace Clifford. It was too bad to be wandering about after Charlotte Osborne, and Fred getting the best of it inside. But all things must have an end, so Miss Osborne, after peeping at this flower and that, pulled a rose, as a special offering for Douglas, and went indoors.

The Admiral still sat in the window while Grace stood looking out. She was speaking to Frederick Osborne as Douglas joined them. He saw Osborne's dark eyes fixed on her, and read admiration on his swarth handsome face. 'Pshaw, what folly. He was angry a short time since because Osborne jibed doubtfully about her beauty, and now he was angry because he admired her.



"You will feel a great deal better for your visit here I am sure, but you would not read so much," Grace was saying as Douglas came over to them.

How fond men are of awakening women's sympathy for their hard work. Frederick had not been talking ten minutes to Grace until he had her pity enlisted for the weary life he had to lead in his chambers, in contrast to the freedom of the country which he had been enjoying the past week. Yet it was all lip deep, Fred Osborne preferred London by far. Its gaiety suited him. Close reading, followed by free relaxation, was what he loved.

"Harry says Fred is to be Lord Chancellor," the Admiral observed smiling. "Never mind him Grace, the fellow has ambition. His books are the road to fame."

Grace laughed and looked at Frederick.

"Is that the way of it?" she said; and then, turning to Douglas, exclaimed, "What a beautiful rose! have you been robbing Miss Osborne?"

"No, it was a gift. Will you have it?" He held it out to her.

"It is I who am robbing," she said as she placed it in her belt.

"Are they twin roses or rival roses?" Osborne asked looking from the flower to Grace.

"Not rivals," she answered laughing. "There should be no rivalry in the world."

"You are delightfully inexperienced, Miss Clifford," he said with another of his covert sneers. "But there cannot be beauty without rivalry, at least amongst women."

"Why not?"

"Because you all hate each other for being handsome."

"Oh that is your experience, is it? and what about your sex? are we ladies alone envious?"

Grace did not mean to give sneer for sneer; she did not even see the force of her own words; but Frederick winced.

"No matter about men's beauty," he said. "they do not require good looks as ladies do."

"You would lead us to think you had a poor opinion of yourself, Osborne," Douglas answered. "That is the doctrine of all ugly men."

"That's right Archie," the Admiral said laughing and tapping his shoulder approvingly.

They all laughed with the Admiral, and Frederick was forced to cover his defeat by joining them. At that moment Miss Osborne's voice was heard from the other window, where she was with her brother and Marion Douglas, inquiring should she ring for lights. But they all voted against them, as they wanted to see the moon get up. She was at the full and would be beautiful presently; and beautiful she was as she rose above the water, and rode across the sky. There was not even a speck of cloud to hide her splendour, they had all drifted away after sunset, and lay in a dark mass above the edge of the horizon.

Half an hour later Grace Clifford, Frederick Osborne, and young Douglas were walking across the beach towards the parsonage, at whose white gate Grace said good-night.

"I had no idea Stedleigh was so rich in rural beauty, as to possess such a girl as Miss Clifford," Osborne observed as they turned away.

"You are not going to fall in love with her, are you?" Douglas answered, trying to laugh.

"Not likely. I am too poor to indulge in the luxury of falling in love. I leave that to rich elder sons," he said, and began whistling.

It was early yet, not more than ten o'clock. Douglas and Osborne instead of going home went along the beach and sat down on a rock. They lighted their cigars and began smoking.

"How long do you stay here?" Douglas asked between the whiffs.

"Well, a month or so. Perhaps more, perhaps less, as things go on," was Osborne's answer.

"You don't care much about the Cliff. Do you find it dull?"

"Slow, rather; but you see one must be somewhere in the country, now every one is out of London."

"You were quite rural in your tastes awhile ago to Miss Clifford."

"Of course one talks that way to women, especially to country-bred girls, you know we must do the sucking-dove sometimes," Fred answered, and went on whiffing his cigar.

Douglas laughed, although he did not always like Fred's way of saying things; but Osborne had the credit of being very clever, and Douglas was some years younger. Osborne's cigar was smoked out first, and he sent the end fizzing into the water at his feet.

"If a man could only get on in life by smoking cigars, what a height I might climb to," he said, as he lighted another, and placed it in his mouth.

"You would like that better than the law-books. What put it in your head to become a barrister?"

"The force of circumstances, my boy. Necessity has no law. I am as fond of my ease as most people. I would like to live and do nothing if I could, keep my yacht, dabble on the turf, own a fine place in town and country, and all that sort of thing; but you see I cannot, so I have just to put up with chambers in the Temple, hammer at the law in hopes of hammering something out of it, and see all the luck going over to my cousin. It's pleasant, is it not? You see Harry and

I are sons of two younger brothers, but I have the bad fortune to be the son of the younger of the two, consequently, when my uncle, Sir George, goes home to his fathers, the Admiral first, and then Harry, steps in for the title and property. In the meanwhile, the prospect of it got him your sister, and the Stedleigh estate, while I may go over the world with a knapsack, like the traveller the other day, only I can't write a book about it. But there are some advantages, too, in my position—I have the less luggage to carry, few women to hunt me, and fewer friends to rob me," and with this philosophical reflection Frederick went on smoking.

"What a queer point you view the world from, Osborne!" Douglas said, after looking at him a moment.

"We see differently now, I daresay; but remember, I have tried it, and you have not. Come to London, and I'll engage to introduce you to a set of men—not low fellows mind, but men of standing—men of fine names, who would rob you by borrowing, or rob you by gambling, and laugh in your face when

they had done. And women, too, of the fairest, ready to give themselves to any one for a suitable settlement, be he maimed, halt, or blind. I can instance a woman such as I speak of, in my own family, my uncle's wife, Lady Osborne."

"Is Lady Osborne young?"

"Yes, and one of the prettiest women in London, as well as the greatest flirt."

"And she a married woman?"

"What has that to do with it?"

Douglas thought it had a great deal to do with it, but he did not say so, and Osborne went on talking, giving him touches of London life and London gaiety, in his peculiar racy, jibing way, until Douglas went homewards musing, with wishes in his mind that had never been there before. What a different picture it was to the midnight lamp, and the lonely student poring over his books, which he had sketched for Grace Clifford a little time before.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## LANDLORD AND TENANT.

IMMEDIATELY after old Williams's funeral a rumour was rife through Stedleigh that Mr. Douglas would not give his family a new lease of the Hill-farm. So far it was only a rumour, as no blow had been struck. Mrs. Williams held back, and Mr. Douglas held back, so that up to nearly the end of August there had been no effort on the part of the Williamses to get the farm, nor anything on Mr. Douglas's side to show that they should not get it.

Mrs. Williams was unwilling to speak to Mr. Douglas, although he had been to see



her, and condoled with her in a friendly way on the loss of her husband, and even paid a tribute to his honesty, good conduct, and so forth. It was all very pleasant, and very kind, doubtless, but Mrs. Williams would rather he had said a word about the farm; but no such word came, and Mr. Douglas had taken himself back to Stedleigh without broaching the subject.

“Tom, had you not better speak to Mr. Watkins?” Mrs. Williams suggested, in a family council; but Tom would not interfere. He had a shrewd notion that what the Stedleigh people said was right, and he was not going to beg the farm of Mr. Watkins or Mr. Douglas either.

Tom having refused to meddle in the matter, Mrs. Williams herself went to Watkins. Watkins was Mr. Douglas’s steward, and in his confidence, if any man was; but he assured Mrs. Williams there had not been a word between him and his employer on the subject of the farm; however, he would speak to him.

Watkins went over the next day to Sted-

leigh. It was the day for settling the weekly accounts, and about one o'clock he entered the library, with the books under his arm. Mr. Douglas went right at the business at once.

When it was settled, and he had given some directions about other matters, he drew over a file, and began leisurely filing various receipts Watkins had given him. This was the signal for the steward to go, and, taking the hint, he began gathering up his books.

At first he seemed as if he were going to speak, and Mr. Douglas looked up, but when the man said nothing, he went on filing his papers; [and Watkins, putting the books under his arm, went towards the door. When he reached it he paused, with his hand on the handle.

"There is a thing I promised to speak to you about, sir; are you too busy now to hear it?"

"No, surely not," Mr. Douglas said, pushing away the file, and facing his steward. "What is it?"

"About Williams's farm, sir. Mrs. Wil-

liams was with me, and asked me to speak to you about it."

Mr. Douglas's face had worn a quiet, attentive expression when Watkins began, but as he went on his mouth drew in, and his eyes got a set look, which, to Watkins, who had been reading his master's countenance for the last twenty years, did not bode much friendliness towards the Williamses.

"What did she want?" he asked.

"Well, sir, she wanted the land, of course. She says she thinks, as she is a widow, that you will not refuse to let her have it on the same terms as her husband had, and Tom would be able to keep things as they were before, and pay regularly, like his father."

"She has been a widow these years for all the good that old man was to her; and so Tom will be able to pay, and keep his mother, and all that, you say?"

"Yes sir, so she told me."

"Was her son with her?"

"No, sir; she just dropped in yesterday evening, and had a cup of tea with my missus, and spoke to me afterwards," Watkins said,

more freely, for his master's words encouraged him, although his face looked none of the pleasantest.

"Why did she not speak to me in place of to you?"

"Well, I guess, sir, she was wanting to have the thing opened to you."

"That was natural enough, perhaps," Mr. Douglas said, meditatively. "Now, Watkins, you may tell Mrs. Williams that you have spoken to me, and that I have been thinking the whole matter over in the expectation of her coming to me. Explain to her that I am determined to act fairly by her, and justly, too. She shall have the farm at the old rate. This last concession I grant on her husband's account, for the land was under-let, and no one else should have it at that but her. Tell her, at the same time, that there are certain conditions I must make, and let her come down to me to-morrow."

Mr. Douglas went on filing his papers without another word, and Watkins went out, rather surprised at the result of the conversation.

In the evening, when tea was over, and Mrs. Watkins had seen that the house was all set to rights, she and her husband went off to Mrs. Williams's to tell her the news.

It was pleasant news, and Mrs. Williams smiled over it complacently. How nice to have the farm, and everything going on just as it used; no change, except the empty arm-chair in the corner. How glad Tom would be when he came in, and they went on pumping the subject dry, until the two women got on the theme of their dairies, while Mr. Watkins lost himself in a cloud of smoke.

Mrs. Watkins had never seen Mrs. Williams's dairy, she would like to do so very much. Now Mrs. Watkins, in the bottom of her heart, prided herself on standing higher in the social scale than Mrs. Williams. Her husband was Mr. Douglas's steward, and enjoyed a handsome salary, and had besides, a much larger farm than Mrs. Williams.

Mrs. Watkins had two women servants to look after things for her, and do all the rough work, while she only inspected, and

lent a hand in lighter matters ; but Mrs. Williams could only afford to keep one, and had to assist in her dairy and in the house-work besides.

Mrs. Watkins's son, too, was going to be married to the daughter of Smith, who kept the great grocery establishment in Cranston, and he would get a good sum of money with her, while Mrs. Williams's son—at least, so people said—was running after Mrs. Douglas's maid.

All this, of course, made a great gap in Mrs. Watkins's mind between her and Mrs. Williams, and she was very patronising and condescending, accordingly.

"Of course there's not much to speak of in my dairy, Mrs. Watkins," the other lady said, as they went across the yard. "Indeed, since my poor husband died I can't say I have looked after it at all ; Ellen was up from the Manor for a few days, and she comes now of an evening to settle things."

By this time they were in the dairy, and found Ellen busy amongst the milk pails.

"Dear me, how clean the place looks ! It's

small, of course, but very nice," Mrs. Watkins said, throwing her eye round, and taking care that Mrs. Williams should see how circumscribed she thought her domain was. "But I daresay it is large enough, ma'am?"

Mrs. Williams was a little chafed, but she had to take the praise and the contempt together.

"There be room enough for all you want, eh, girl?" she said, turning a smiling look on Ellen, who was still busy with her pails.

"Quite, ma'am," she said, "when there's not too many people in it."

Mrs. Watkins looked disconcerted for a moment.

"I am afraid we are in your way?" she said.

"No, not in the least; you must not go till I show you my cheese. See here, ma'am," Mrs. Williams said, by way of apology, at the same time producing her cheese.

Then a long talk followed about cheese, and the way of making it, Mrs. Williams's way, and Mrs. Watkins's, and so on, until

Mrs. Watkins, getting tired of the subject made a sally at a churn, and asked Ellen how much cream it held, and how much butter she took off? When Ellen had satisfied her, and listened to her talk about her own cows, and her own butter, for a while, she marched away, followed by Mrs. Williams, who, as soon as she came indoors, began making preparations to get her visitors something to eat.

A nice meat pie, and an apple tart, made their appearance, with cheese and ale to flank them; and Mr. Watkins, who had just come in with Tom and John Williams, sat down well contented to his supper. When Ellen came from the dairy she was sent back for cream for the apple tart, which Tom went to assist her in carrying, and they were so long about it, that Mrs. Williams had to go to the door to call them. However, they came at last, and they all sat down to supper very comfortably.

"The farm is to be ours, Tom," Mrs. Williams said, after a while. "I suppose Mr. Watkins told you about it?"



Tom looked up with a piece of beefsteak on his fork.

"Aye, he did," he said; "but be you sure about it, mother? What be the conditions, I wonder?"

Those same conditions had been troubling her, although she did not like to say so.

"They'll not be hard, I hope," she said.

"Aye, well, we'll see; may be the bargain is, that you send me to Australia. Mr. Douglas be a queer chap, who would ask anything," and Tom laughed.

"You be foolish, Tom, to get such things in your head."

"You wait till you see who be right, you, or me, mother; but, I'll say this, Mr. Douglas has no right to take the farm from us and give it to strangers. What do you think, Mr. Watkins?"

It was rather out of the way for Williams to expect Watkins to give his voice against his master; he had never been known so to give it for the last twenty years, whatever he might be supposed to think, therefore he said cautiously—

"The land is his, you know, Tom, and he can give it to whom he pleases."

"Very fine," Tom answered angrily, "very fine; but I think the land be ours, or ought to be ours, as long as I can pay for it. My grandfather, and my father before me, were born here."

"Aye, that's your notion; but the land is his."

"I wish Mr. Douglas was like his son, but that he'll never be," Tom said. "We would have no talk about law then, he would do what be right."

"Don't be talking, Tom," his brother said, quietly; "you be always working yourself up."

"Oh, yes; he be foolish and hot; you won't mind him, Mr. Watkins?" Mrs. Williams said, in a tremble of fear lest Watkins would tell Mr. Douglas what her son had said, and so spoil everything.

Watkins assured her he would not.

"I think it's time I was back at the Manor," Ellen said, rising to go.

"You be going home with Ellen, Tom?"

Mrs. Williams exclaimed, glad of any excuse to get him out.

"Yes, I be," he said, rising from his seat, and taking up his cap.

"I think it's time we went too; it's very late," Watkins remarked, looking at his wife; "we will be down the hill-side together."

Mrs. Watkins began fussing to get on her shawl and bonnet. Tom stood near the door waiting.

"You say nothing more as you go along about the land, there's a good lad," his mother whispered.

"No, mother, I won't."

When the whole party was ready, Mrs. Williams sidled away from her son to bid her friends good-night.

The next day Watkins was busy down at one end of the lawn, measuring and marking the distances for planting young trees, when Mr. Douglas joined him.

"Busy at this work to-day, Watkins. It's very hot standing here, is it not?"

"Yes, sir, rather; but I don't mind. I want to get the place marked off to-day, and

the trees planted to-morrow. What will you have put in, sir?"

"Well, larch and fir, I think; a little planting was badly wanted here. This spot looked very bare, and it will hide the back of the lodge. I never liked to see that wall looking through."

"Aye, sir," Watkins answered, going on with his measuring. "I was up at Williams's farm last night, Mr. Douglas, and gave them your message."

"Who do you mean by them?" Mr. Douglas asked.

"Tom and his mother, sir."

"I only sent a message to Mrs. Williams. I sent none to her son."

"It was all one, I thought, sir; however, I gave it to both, and she is coming down to the house to-day."

"What did she say?" Mr. Douglas asked again.

"She was very glad, sir, to have the place; very glad, and said it was very good of you."

"Humph!" Mr. Douglas said, walking slowly away.

About the time that Mr. Douglas and Watkins were discussing this matter in the grounds, Mrs. Williams had made her way to the house, and sat in the hall waiting for its master.

She had not been long seated when Mrs. Douglas came down stairs, and stopped to speak to her a moment, in her kind friendly way, and then brought her into a small room off the hall, where she would be more comfortable.

"You are waiting to see Mr. Douglas about the farm, I suppose Mrs. Williams," she said, standing by the fire-place, while Mrs. Williams stood at the table facing her.

"Oh yes, ma'am, and it will be so nice if he lets us have it. Tom is such a fine hand at managing a farm. It's him ma'am that has done everything these years gone, his father you know ma'am—"

The flood-gates of Mrs. Williams's eloquence were opened, and she was going on to tell the well-known story of her husband's imbecility, when Mrs. Douglas interrupted her with—

"I know, Mrs. Williams, all you would say ;

Tom has been a good son, and I am sure Mr Douglas will do what is right."

"I am sure he will ma'am, and that's what I said when I got his message, although people say he has a quarrel against Tom." This she said inquiringly, darting a searching look from under her black bonnet at Mrs. Douglas.

"I have heard of no quarrel. In fact, Mr. Douglas has not named your son to me at all."

Mrs. Williams was relieved. If there was any ill-feeling to her son, surely Mrs. Douglas would have heard it.

"There is Mr. Douglas's step now, I think. Yes, he has gone into the library, shall I tell him you are here?"

"If you please ma'am."

Mrs. Douglas went out of the room across the hall, and put her head in at the library door.

"Oh, you are come in, I thought I heard your step," she said to her husband, who was drawing down the window-blinds. "Mrs. Williams is here, and wants to see you, shall I send her in?"

"Yes, certainly, I expected her."

"Mrs. Williams," Mrs. Douglas called from the library door, "will you come this way?"

There was an eager anxiousness in Mrs. Williams's step, as she went into the library, curtseying as she entered. It was a kind of presentation day with the poor woman, and she had taken more than ordinary care with her toilet. Very respectable she looked in her deep mourning, with crape on her black dress, and a large black shawl crossed on her breast as carefully as if it had been a day in November.

"Good morning, Mrs. Williams," Mr. Douglas said in answer to her salutation. "This is a fine day, but warm. Will you take a chair? We have business to talk of which may occupy some time."

Mrs. Williams took the offered chair with another curtsey.

"Watkins tells me you got the message I sent through him," Mr. Douglas began, as soon as she was seated. "You will be willing to abide by such arrangements as I shall

make, I hope. I mean to deal fairly by you Mrs. Williams ; I wish neither to act unjustly nor ungenerously."

" So Mr. Watkins said, sir," Mrs. Williams answered. " He told me you would let us have the farm at the same rent as my husband had it. Of course you considered my being a widow sir, and how badly the land has done the last season, and it may not be better this you know sir."

How much longer she would have gone on would be difficult to say, had not Mr. Douglas put an abrupt termination to her talk, by saying quietly,

" I let you have the farm at the same rate as your husband had it, solely out of respect to him, Mrs. Williams, and not for the seasons and all that. Let us come to the point. You are to have the land upon certain conditions. Can John manage a farm?"

" John, sir? Tom of course you mean, sir."

" No ; I mean John."

Mrs. Williams looked aghast.

" But it's Tom sir that sees to everything,



he be the eldest son, you know, and my old man—”

“ Your old man, nor any other old man, cannot make me give my land if I don’t like,” Mr. Douglas said, somewhat sternly.

“ But, sir—”

“ Wait a moment Mrs. Williams, do not talk, but listen. I will give the land to you, and John can superintend it. Tom must be provided for elsewhere ; he shall not be on any farm of mine.”

He fixed his eye steadily on her, and waited for an answer. The woman looked down without speaking, fidgetting her handkerchief nervously through her fingers. Tom’s hap hazard assertion that Mr. Douglas would demand his being sent to Australia, came to her mind, and she felt frightened. What would she not have given to have had her strong son there to support her, and make the fight good with Mr. Douglas ?

“ Do you understand me, Mrs. Williams ?” Mr. Douglas asked more gently.

“ If you mean me to part from my son sir,

I could not do it, indeed I could not do it," she said, with nervous distress.

"Nonsense," Mr. Douglas answered, "I don't want you to part with him. You can have the land yourself, your other son can look after it, and your men; he is a respectable quiet fellow, I believe. Tom will be far better in a situation; you could make a sort of farm bailiff of him, something of the kind might be got about here, I dare say. I will see to it myself, if you like."

Mrs. Williams looked him full in the face, and rose from her chair, with no sign of the nervous fear about her she had exhibited a minute before.

"No, Mr. Douglas, I could not turn away my son from my door."

There was a quiet dignity in her manner as she said it, that for a moment took all homeliness away from her.

"You will think differently after awhile," Mr. Douglas said, without a change either in his face or his manner. "You could not do better for the young man. than by doing what I advise. There is old Pring at White

Hall Farm, just wanting such a man as your son. I can get him in there if you like; he would be out of the way of mischief."

"He would not be in the way of mischief with me, surely sir," Mrs. Williams answered.

"Yes he would, anywhere near Stedleigh. I am willing to do what I can for you, Mrs. Williams, but I cannot have your son poaching my hares."

"I don't believe it, sir," she said, vehemently. "Whoever told you that, told a wicked untruth."

"Come, Mrs. Williams, you must not excite yourself here, Tom knows about this poaching business, he and I have talked of it before now. Just go home quietly, and think of what I have said. I will call with you to-morrow for your answer. If you agree to what I say, you shall have the farm from year to year, as long as your son keeps off it: but if you do not agree, of course you must be prepared to give it up on the twenty-fifth of next month."

"Be you really in earnest sir?"

"Yes; you have heard my unchangeable

purpose; you may do as you please, of course."

With a slow step Mrs. Williams made her way across the lawn, through the wood and up the hill side path towards the farm. Tom would be waiting for her above, what would he say? How was she to face him, and tell him all Mr. Douglas had said. She half feared her tall strong son, so strong and so quick in his wrath. She wished Mr. Douglas had not said he would come to her to-morrow. If Tom met him, who could say what he might do in a moment of hot anger? What was she to do, and how could she tell Tom best, so as to keep him cool? Aye, there he was, coming down the hill side, with his free swinging step, whistling as he came towards her, to help her up the steep path.

living from the difficulties and quarrels of his neighbours. Poor little soul, if the world was all happy, prosperous and friendly, where would he have got bread I wonder? The third side of the square faced the street that led down the hill side, and the fourth opened on a broad road leading direct to the sea, which lay about a quarter of a mile off.

Along each side of this road several fishermen's cottages were scattered, giving it almost the appearance of a street. At the end of the road close to the beach, was a strongly built edifice, from the side of which a long pole was reared, having a large flag at the top that went flaunting and flapping when the breeze was stirring, and lay lazily folded round its tall staff when the wind was down. This flag, and a few lounging men in blue jackets and brass buttons, announced to the curious, that the building in question was the coast guard station. A little beyond it was Stedleigh Pier, built for the accommodation of his tenants, by Mr. Douglas. It had been an old crumbling wooden concern, when he came to Stedleigh, but now it was a good,

firm, stone structure, running along the face of the shore for some distance, with two arms stretching out at either end. These arms gradually sloped round and narrowed, until they formed a tolerable harbour, into which vessels of an ordinary size could drop, and lie in safety from a storm. From the end of the pier along the shore, great rocks rose up grey and frowning, with narrow creeks between them, where the waves came thundering in in stormy weather, while at other times one might sit on the shore and watch the water playing quietly about their base. The prospect from the hill above the town, where the church and Mr. Clifford's house stood, gave a view of the village, the white shining pier, and the sea, away over to the horizon itself; but from the windows of the rectory you could only see the pier and the ocean, for the hill lay between you and the town.

The rectory was built with a cottage front, with upper rooms at the back, giving it rather a quizzical appearance, as though a large house was overhanging and looking down on a little one, but inside it was pretty, and comfort-

able, and that more than compensated for defects of architecture. A small gate led into a short unpretending avenue, planted with evergreens, and a few scattered trees that shaded it from the road. A green plot facing the house, had been recently cleared into a croquet ground for the children, where they knocked the balls about to their hearts' content. Round at the side of the house, a gate led into a walled garden well stocked with vegetables and fruit trees. The upper end of this garden was devoted to flowers, and was Grace Clifford's especial domain.

Mr. Clifford was a widower. His wife who had been dead some three or four years, had brought him some money, some beauty, and the church interest which got him the living of Stedleigh. After all, that is as much as a curate has any right to expect, although some of them do expect a good deal more, and get it too sometimes. About Mrs. Clifford I need not say much, she is dead and let her rest. She was a dawdling, delicate woman, always ailing, selfish, and irritable. While she lived nobody cared about her, and when she

died nobody missed her. Mr. Clifford was the very opposite of his wife. He had a friendly shake hands or a friendly word for every one; consequently he was just as popular as his wife was the reverse. He had a good, tall frame and a good-humoured, handsome face, with the jovial, pleasant, hearty manner, that always takes the world as it comes, and makes the best of it. A very excellent world Mr. Clifford had always found it, and although he made war against it, and all its pomps and vanities every Sunday in public, he agreed capitally with it in private life. Stedleigh's rector was on the whole a well-tempered, easy-going sort of man, and the Stedleigh folks, like the rector, were easy-going people, who listened complacently to his preaching on Sunday, and followed his practice through the week. Beware of drunkenness, he would cry from the pulpit, and then he would go home, and see the temptation before him after dinner, in the shape of a good bottle of port, and wink jovially, not at the sin, of course, but at the wine. People did say, that Mr. Clifford, when he dined at Stedleigh Manor, where the



wine was excellent, certainly took, well, not too much perhaps, but still enough to make him talkative; but then Mr. Clifford was a known talker, and perhaps the wine had nothing to do with it.

So much for Mr. Clifford himself; and now a word about his family. He had six children, equally divided; three sons and three daughters. Of the former, there were two older than Grace. Of these two, the elder was designed for the church by his father, although he did not so desire himself. However despite his wishes to the contrary, Tom Clifford was sent to Cambridge, as being less expensive than Oxford, and less given to high church dogmas, to which his father had no leaning.

Why do people ever call a son Tom, when it is so well known that all Toms are given to be wild? the name is a proverb, yet they will go on perpetuating it. Mr. Clifford had called his eldest son Tom, so no wonder he turned out a troublesome character, and ran away from Cambridge, because he wanted to see the world, and did not want to be a parson. A few months after this escapade, Tom Clifford

found himself at Melbourne, with his money nearly gone, and want staring him in the face. Then came a letter from Grace, poor little Grace, sending him a few pounds, which she had managed to save out of the housekeeping, for his father would give him nothing. With Grace's gift the young prodigal bought a spade and a pickaxe, and went up to Ballaret, along with a company of gold seekers, to look for nuggets.

Tom's brother George had a taste for engineering, and was always to be seen sketching bridges and making tunnels, but Tom's runaway sealed the fate of George's pencil, and he found himself thrust into the groove which his brother refused to fit, because his uncle had a fat living in his gift that Mr. Clifford had his eye on. So George was sent away to Cambridge, as his brother had been, by that jovial easy tempered father of his, who, like many other jovial, free mannered men, had a will of his own under his insouciant exterior.

While Tom is busy with his pickaxe, at Ballaret, and George is plodding away at

college, Grace keeps house at home, and mourns for her favourite brother whom she loves, in spite of his delinquencies, perhaps for the very daring that led to them.

The two children next in age to Grace were girls. Jane the elder a bright-eyed, laughing girl of fifteen, and Annie some three years younger. Last of all came a boy of seven, fair-haired and hazel-eyed, like his father, and Grace, the pet and plaything of the house. As the eldest daughter of the rector, Grace had of course many duties to perform. It was, she who visited the old women of the parish, to whom her pleasant face and pleasant voice was always welcome. She kept an eye after the schools too, going in occasionally to have a look at the children, and a word with the mistress, and then on the sabbath she had her class at Sunday school. But it was in her father's house that Grace's presence was most felt, and her gentle influence most exercised; for my heroine is not one of those active women, who are busy everywhere except at home.

Grace was always very busy in the morn-

ings, but her afternoons and evenings were devoted to books or work, a walk over to Stedleigh Manor, or to The Cliff, to see her old friend the Admiral. Sometimes she went with Jane or Annie, or both perhaps ; at others she went alone, and it somehow happened that two or three times within the week she would chance to meet Archie Douglas, and Archie would walk home with her to the rectory gate, occasionally, but not always coming in to have a chat with Mr. Clifford, and then goodbye until he met Grace again, all by the merest accident of course. However, on this especial morning Archie has taken it into his head to call at the rectory and see Mr. Clifford, with the ulterior view of seeing Grace, and finding out what she thought of Frederick Osborne. Now why on earth Archie should wish to know Grace's thoughts about Frederick I cannot tell, nor did he ask himself precisely, but still he felt himself wishing that she might not like him, although he kept saying it was nothing to him whether she did or not.

Swinging open the rectory gate, Archie

came along up the avenue upon a party of croqueters, who were hitting the balls right and left, with more energy than skill.

"Archie, Archie," the cry went round, "will you have a game?" and Jane thrust her croquet mallet into his hand.

"Rather early and hot for croquet, Jennie," he laughed, pushing back the offered mallet. "I came to see how your father is puss, run and tell him I am here."

"You can't see papa," Annie said, coming forward demurely with her hands behind her back, "because he is busy, so you had better come and play."

"Busy at what, Annie?" Archie asked, looking down on the little prim face turned up to his.

"Oh at his sermon for to-morrow; this is Saturday you know," and the child's eye turned to the study window, where her father's broad large figure could be seen bending over a desk writing busily.

"Where is Grace then? Is she busy too?" Archie asked with some impatience.

"No, Grace is in the garden; come and I'll

show you," Annie said, while one little hand came round from her back and was placed in Douglas's.

"I shall go too," Jane cried, throwing up her bright saucy eye.

Away the party went, Jane in front with Johnnie holding on to her skirt, Archie and Annie, hand and hand, bringing up the rear.

"Grace, Grace where are you? Here is Archie Douglas," Jane cried, running down a walk towards the flower-beds, where Grace trowel in hand, was stooping to loosen the clay from some roots.

Why must Grace blush every time she meets young Douglas unexpectedly? She has been angry with herself for it over and over again; yet there she stood blushing and laughing through her blushes, bright and fresh and pretty, under the shade of her large garden hat, and Archie found himself pressing her hand with a warmth he never indulged in, when he saw her at Stedleigh, or at Admiral Osborne's, and only ventured on now and then, when they met or parted, with no one by. The

hand-shaking over they went wandering about looking at the flowers, followed by the three guides Archie had brought with him, while he wished them, where other gentlemen have wished intrusive youngsters before now, at the antipodes. But he was soon released from their presence, for Johnnie, having seen a butterfly, started in pursuit, followed by Annie. It so happened that the chase led them right over one of Grace's flower beds, and Jane, too old to join in the hunt, stood laughing at the mischief. It was grand luck for Archie, and he blessed that butterfly as it enabled him to turn the whole party out for bad behaviour, and thus get a *tête-à-tête* with Grace.

"Does your father take long to write his sermons, Grace?" he asked, by way of saying something. "Annie told me he was too busy to be disturbed."

"Not long I think, but he is generally in his study until late on Saturday. He writes letters, and looks over bills and all that, at the close of the week. Do you want him particularly?"

"Oh no," he replied eagerly, half afraid she would insist on sending for him; "I only came over to have a chat."

"Can't you chat with me then?" she said laughing.

"Perhaps you are too busy. I hear you are to dine at the Admiral's to-day."

"Who told you so?"

"Can't you guess? Why Harry; I left him at Stedleigh when I came away. He tells me Frederick Osborne has ridden into Cranston to buy new boots to case his handsome feet in at dinner. By Jove Grace, you have made a conquest."

"Nonsense, Archie! oh, such nonsense, I wonder at you;" yet she laughed at his nonsense merrily, whether from being amused, or from believing in Frederick's admiration Archie could not tell.

"Come Grace, tell me what you really think of him?"

"Well I really have not thought of him at all," she said, "I scarcely know him."

"I like him Grace, he seems a pleasant careless fellow," Archie said in the vain hope



that this free expression of his opinion would extract hers.

"Indeed," she said arching her pretty brows.

How provoking she was, and how reticent.

"Do you dine at The Cliff to-day?"

"No, nor does Harry, he is to be with us, so you will have this Adonis all to yourself and Charlotte Osborne. He is to be fiddler and dancer too it seems. I suppose he likes it."

"Probably, at all events I am thrown on him, and he must do his best to amuse me, so do not hit at him that way;" and Grace laughed again.

A servant's head came popping in at the garden gate.

"Miss Grace, my master wants you for a moment."

"Very well, Margaret, I will be with him presently. Will you come, Archie?"

"No, not to-day, some other time; I might disturb him," Archie answered. "Shall I see you at Stedleigh soon Grace? Will you come to-morrow?"

"Not to-morrow, that will be Sunday you

know, but I shall be over on Monday or Tuesday."

She gave him her hand, and he went away as wise about Frederick Osborne as he had come, and not quite so comfortable.

## CHAPTER X.

## TWO SCENES IN THE OLD HOMESTEAD.

MR. DOUGLAS was not a man easily turned from a purpose. He had made up his mind respecting Tom Williams, and he meant to adhere to his resolution. Mrs. Williams would come to see the perfect justice of his decision in time; a night's reflection even, might convince her. He bore no ill-will to old Williams's widow; on the contrary, he was willing to serve her, and would serve her if she allowed him. Let her give up Tom. Let her send away this troublesome son of hers, whose presence was a grievance to Mr.

Douglas, and she would find him a good landlord. He had offered to provide for Tom; he would see that he was comfortably placed in a position of trust, a position Mr. Douglas knew he was capable of filling, and which would take him out of the reach of the Stedleigh game. If, on the contrary, Mrs. Williams elected to keep her son, she must look out for land elsewhere. Mr. Douglas had another tenant for the hill farm, in Joe Watkins, his steward's brother, and Watkins should have it if Mrs. Williams proved contumacious.

This was Mr. Douglas's mind when Mrs. Williams left him, and it was still his mind the following day as he went along the path that led to her farm. It was a steep, rough, winding path, but he cared little for that; he was light of body and strong of lung, so the ascent did not tell much upon him.

It was about three o'clock when he came in sight of the farm, and a few minutes more brought him to the gate, which he opened, and closed again carefully after him. No one was visible about the place; a few hens were

straggling through the yard, and a dog, which was squatting near the house, got up at the visitor's approach, barked valiantly, and then ran away like a coward. Mrs. Williams was probably expecting him, and the yelping of the dog would bring her to the door Mr. Douglas thought, as he crossed the yard. Mrs. Williams however, did not make her appearance, and he reached the entrance without having seen any one. The door stood partly closed, and Mr. Douglas, instead of pushing it entirely open, raised his stick and gave two or three sharp knocks, to which a strong, manly voice answered, "Come in." At the same moment a hand from the inside drew the door back, and left the passage free.

Tom Williams, with the door held in his hand, met Mr. Douglas as he entered. Mr. Douglas looked round the kitchen; a white deal table stood opposite the fire-place, and at each end of the fire itself, which burned and cracked cheerfully, two chairs were laid. On one of them Tom had probably been sitting when Mr. Douglas knocked, for it was

pushed sideways from the fire, as if the person occupying it had risen suddenly. A kettle was singing merrily on the fallen bar of the grate, before which a huge grey cat lay lazily winking at the red coals. Opposite the door was a large mahogany press, which stood partly open, disclosing a row of white and gold china, and a sparkling array of tumblers and glasses. Mr. Douglas took it all in at a glance, and then his eye went round the kitchen again, and rested on a door at the farther end, which led to some of the other rooms in the house. He had not come much within the threshold, where he stood with his eye on the door beyond him, Tom standing also, with the entrance door in his hand.

"I want to see Mrs. Williams," Mr. Douglas said after a moment, without looking at Tom.

Williams let go his hold of the door, and took a step back towards the fire-place.

"You can't see my mother to-day, sir," he answered, quietly; "but I will do as well, I suppose."

Mr. Douglas advanced a little further into the house.

"It is your mother my business is with, not with you, Williams," he said.

"My mother's business is my business, Mr. Douglas," Tom replied, in a calm, determined tone; "therefore, if you please, I am here to settle this affair. Will you take a chair, sir?"

Mr. Douglas moved round the table, and took the chair Tom offered him.

"Tell Mrs. Williams I am here," he said, without noticing Tom's demand to settle the business.

"Whatever there be to say, say to me, sir," Williams answered, not moving an inch. "You can't see my mother to-day."

"I want to have nothing to do with you, Williams," Mr. Douglas said, laying his hand on the table, and looking Tom straight in the face.

"You had plenty to do with me yesterday, it seems, when you wanted to turn me out of my mother's house," Tom said, answering the look with one as straight.

"I don't want to interfere with you further than to have you off my land. Your mother can keep you if she likes, but if you are to remain with her, she shall not stay here. I am still willing to do what is fair; I will get you a situation."

"Thank you, sir," Tom said in a tone of sarcastic gratitude; "but I prefer working on my own land to working on other people's."

"Yes, I dare say," Mr. Douglas answered, drily; "but all things considered, it is not to be wondered at, that I do not wish you to work on my land."

Williams's cheek reddened.

"You be going back on that old story of Davis, sir; what proof have you that he meant me at all? I wonder at you, Mr. Douglas."

"Proof enough to satisfy myself. What I said then I repeat now, I will have no poachers on my land, I told your mother so yesterday."

He raised his hand, and laid it down heavily on the table, as if to add force to his words.



“ Aye, and you wanted her to put me out of her house,” Williams said in a dogged angry tone.

“ I offered to do what was fair. For your father’s sake, Williams, I was willing, I am still willing, to let your mother keep the farm at the old rent, although I could get more for it in another quarter. I am willing to do this, as I said, on your father’s account. He was an honest, trustworthy man, I never had a complaint against him in all my life, nor had Mr. Westbrooke either; he always spoke well of your father, therefore the land shall be your mother’s, if you do not obstinately stand in her light.”

Williams leant with his shoulder against the mantle piece, one hand in his pocket, the other hanging by his side, his large blue eye fixed on Mr. Douglas’ face.

When he stopped speaking, the young man moved away a little from the chimney piece, and drew up his tall powerful figure to its full height, then he stepped towards the table, and laid his strong brown hand on it, while the blood rose in his handsome sunburnt face.

"You call it fair, to tempt my mother to part from me, do you, Mr. Douglas?" Tom asked. "You call it fair, to tempt her, because she be fond of the place, but she be not so fond of it as that. I be fond of it, too, I don't deny it: but since you choose to take it, let it go, though I don't believe you have any right to it."

"No right to my own land, Williams? that is a new notion."

"I say again, no right to it. There's not a man in the county but yourself would have thought he had a right to take land from us, that we and ours have held over three hundred years, not a man, Mr. Douglas."

"I don't care for the people in the county, they are nothing to me; the land is mine, I can do as I like with it."

"Of course I be no fool, I know the land is yours," Tom answered; "but right is right, for all that. The lease is run down, I can't make you renew it, and even if I could I'm too poor a man to go to law with a rich one. If Mr. Hamilton was like me he might have

let you keep what you got a hold of from him."

Mr. Douglas's face grew white with anger.

"I did not come here to talk of Mr. Hamilton. I have nothing at all to do with him or with you either."

He rose and pushed away his chair.

"I have acted fairly and justly by you, Williams; if you don't choose to take advantage of it, I cannot help you, you may repent it some day."

"Aye, we may all repent, Mr. Douglas. A poor man fights at odds against a rich one; but we may have a reckoning for this day's work yet."

"What do you mean, Williams?" Mr. Douglas asked, turning round as he got near the door.

"I mean that I have a right to this land you be putting me out of, as long as I can pay rent for it. It sheltered me and mine before your name was ever known in Stedleigh, and I mean that there be a day of settling for this morning's job."

"I'm not going to be threatened into giving

you the land, there is no use trying that with me. Let me hear no more of you. I want to hear no more of you. I warn you off my land, and I warn you off Stedleigh. If you set foot inside it, I'll take you up as a trespasser."

"A trespasser"—

Williams, moved towards the door after Mr. Douglas.

"I warn you off this land; never set foot upon it, till the day you have a right to claim it, that be trespass too, mind," he said as he went out. "I owe you something for this, Mr. Douglas, and I'll pay the debt yet.

"I want to have nothing to say to you, Williams, I have a clear conscience regarding you, what I have done was only strict justice."

He walked on as he spoke, right across the yard, and out of the gate. Tom Williams stood in the doorway looking after him.

"I'll settle you some day," he muttered, "I'll settle you."

The words were spoken in bitter anger, very bitter anger. Tom did not stop to think even of their meaning, still less how he was to ful-

fil them. He felt a sort of vague assurance of being able to do something at some time, but when the time was to be, or what the something was, he never stopped to consider. Mr. Douglas was far away out of William's reach, rich and strong, surrounded by many friends, Tom's hand was not likely to touch a man like him.

Mr. Douglas crossed the yard, and went out of the gate, drawing it after him with a bang. Williams stood in the doorway with his clenched hand laid against the side of it, and an angry eye fixed on the gate through which he had passed, his mind so full of wrath, that he did not hear the door at the farther end of the kitchen open to admit his mother. She came over close to him without his hearing her, and put her hand on his shoulder.

"Well, Tom, lad," she said kindly, "don't be vexing yourself about that man, let him go."

Williams turned round at his mother's voice.

"Vexing myself, there's no use vexing my-

self, mother, he will have the land, and he must get it, that's all.

He moved from the door over to the fire-place, and leant with his shoulder against the mantel-piece, as he had leant before Mr. Douglas. Mrs. Williams followed him, and stood by the fire.

"There be no putting a thing out of his head," she said, "every one says that of him. But it be hard of him to turn me out of the old house, where I have lived this seven and twenty years," and the tears came hot into her eyes.

"Hard, mother, aye, it be hard; and, after all, let me go; it be better may be, than leaving the old place," Tom answered.

"It would not be the old place without thee, lad. Where would the farm be, I wonder, if you went?" she said, shaking her head.

Tom made no answer, but put up his elbow on the chimney-piece, clenched his hand, and laid his head against it. Mrs. Williams drew a chair over, and sat down at the corner of the fire-place, near her son.

"I tell you what I be thinking, Tom, I'll speak to Mrs. Douglas."

"Ye might as well speak to the wind, there be no voice in that house but his. I'll have no begging of him either, he wants the place, and let him have it, we'll have a settlement another day. What it be we are to do be the thing now."

"Aye, that's it, Tom : but you be so good at managing," his mother said, resigning herself with a sigh, into the strong hands of her son, in whose wisdom she had perfect faith.

"We must do something, I be thinking about Cawton's farm, mother ; would you like that ?"

A sudden shadow darkened the doorway, and John Williams came in.

"What about Cawton's farm ?" he asked, "Are we not to have the place ?"

"No ; Mr. Douglas won't hear reason," Tom said.

John Williams came round to his mother's side, and stood at the fire, opposite his brother.

"Cawton's farm be too big," he said, going

back to the words he had heard as he entered, without noticing Tom's answer to his question.

"There be no other land to be got here," Tom answered.

"May be they'd split it," Mrs. Williams suggested.

John shook his head.

"I'll take the whole of it," Tom said.

"How would you stock it man?" John asked, looking hard into the fire.

"Aye! that be it, Tom, unless we draw out the bank money," Mrs. Williams answered.

This bank money was a sum old Williams had left in Cranston bank, to be divided between his two sons, his widow to have the life use of the farm and stock.

John made no answer, but kept looking into the fire.

"My share would not be enough, but I can borrow from old Spratt, he offered me money to stock a farm in my father's time," Tom said, not in a very pleasant tone, for John's silence displeased him.

"Aye, and Mr. Douglas would get his foot



on your neck rightly then," John muttered, still without looking up.

"I think he'd like to have his foot on my neck," Tom said, angrily, "but he had better keep out of this. He warned me off Stedleigh, and I warned him off the land here. If he sets foot on it, I'll take him up for trespass."

"Tom, lad, did ye say that?" Mrs. Williams cried aghast.

"I did; and I'll do it too."

John, with his eye still on the fire, never said a word, but a smile came to his lips.

"Eh, Tom, lad, ye be foolish," his mother said.

"I'll settle him yet," he muttered, "I be not done with him."

"Let him be, Tom, let him be. It be ill to put your hand in a lion's mouth," Mrs. Williams said, as she got up, and went busy-ing herself about the place, preparing her son's tea.

During her preparations John still sat looking at the fire, without speaking, while Tom, silent too, leant against the mantel piece, with his clenched hand under his head. It was a

hard thing to leave that pleasant old home, a very hard thing; and as Mrs. Williams spread the comfortable board, which she had been spreading from day to day, in that kitchen, for the last seven and twenty years, it was no wonder her heart was heavy. Mr. Douglas's decree, as seen from his own point of view, and from hers, was a widely different thing; to the one it was just and equitable, to the other cruel and unfair. The thought of giving up the place that had sheltered her for seven-and-twenty years, was tugging hard at her as she moved about the kitchen, through which she was soon to move no longer. But Mrs. Williams had never been a repining, or a selfish woman. She did not fancy that the blow hit her more forcibly than any one else. She did not suppose her case was the worst, or that she alone had a right to grumble and complain, while every one else must stand by and listen. Had she been of such a temper, how would a hot, angry man like Tom Williams have come out of the strife? He would either have been worried and goaded into some act of quick vengeance

against Mr. Douglas, or he would have taken the hard savings his father bequeathed him, and left the country.

Such men as Tom Williams, generous, eager, and warm-tempered, require to be managed, comforted, and calmed. Fortunately for him his mother was fitted for the task. All the time that she was bustling round the kitchen, making her preparations, she was trying to choke down her own regrets, and thinking how she could ease Tom's trouble. John gave her little alarm, he was a quiet silent man, not given to hot words, or, indeed, to many words at all; with Tom her chief fear lay, and her chief love too.

"Here lads be coffee that will do ye good," she said, in a cheerful voice, as she handed each of them a cup of what she so strongly recommended, "ye had a hard day's work."

Tom withdrew himself from the chimney-piece, and drew a chair to the table, while John turned one towards it likewise.

"This be good coffee, mother," he said, when he tasted it; "but it is not many cups we shall have here."

"Well, that be little matter," she said, "the worst be over now. I begin not to mind."

"Aye, if we had a place to put our heads into, that be the thing," John rejoined.

"Cawton's land, I thought you had fixed on that," Mrs. Williams said, "it be better land than this, I think, eh, John?"

"Yes, it be far better," John said, with his mouth full of boiled beef.

"Aye, but if it be too big a farm," Tom replied.

"Have patience," John answered, with the beef still in his mouth.

"Have patience, for what?"

"You look at the land, and we will go shares in stocking it, be ye satisfied now?"

Tom held out his hand, and grasped his brother's, neither spoke, that firm grip needed no words to strengthen it. As the two young men let go the clasp of each other's hands, a quick strong step approached the house, and Mr. Clifford stood in the doorway.

"How do you do, Mrs. Williams?" he said, in his good humoured pleasant tones; "don't

let me disturb you, I only called to inquire for you, I won't go in."

"Oh yes sir, you must," she said, rising, and going to the door, "we have just done our tea."

Mr. Clifford still hesitated. "No, no, another time will do," he said, neither liking to come in, at an untoward moment, nor willing to go until he had heard the news respecting the farm.

"Come in, do come in, sir," Tom Williams said, adding his voice to his mother's, "ye be not in the way, sir, we be always glad to see ye."

Mrs. Williams bustled over, pushed away the table, and carefully dusted a chair for her visitor.

Mr. Clifford followed her, and seated himself right before the fire, to the great annoyance of the cat, which Tom Williams pushed away very uncivilly with his foot, to make way for the rector.

John got up quietly, and went out, leaving Tom and his mother to entertain their visitor.

"How be Miss Grace, sir?" Mrs. Wil-

liams asked, as soon as Mr. Clifford's anxieties about the health of her and her family had been set at rest, "how be Miss Grace and all the family?"

"All quite well, thank you my friend. Indeed I am glad to say the doctor has never made much money out of my house, at least for some years past," he added, remembering that Mrs. Clifford had rarely been out of his hands.

"You be pretty strong, sir?" Tom said.

Mr. Clifford smiled, "yes, pretty strong," he assented. "Do you think we shall have rain this evening, Williams?" he asked, as he deposited his umbrella against the corner of the fireplace.

"Oh no, sir, not a drop. I be going down to Cawton's place after awhile, and I would not like to get wet."

"Aye," Mrs. Williams said, glad to have the strings of her tongue loose, "we be going to leave this the end of next month, and we need to get a place to go to."

"I met Mr. Douglas in Stedleigh village,

and he told me you and he had disagreed about the land."

"Did he tell you he wanted me to put my son out—did he tell you that, sir?" Mrs. Williams asked.

"He has odd ideas, very odd, my good friend," Mr. Clifford said, with a smile; "and indeed he did say something about Tom." Mr. Clifford paused, and looked with a laugh in his eye, at Williams. "He seemed to think in fact, that he was too fond of hare soup."

"Aye, he be going about with that story. Don't kill a dog, but give him a bad name," Tom said, with a hot cheek.

"Never mind, Tom," Mrs. Williams rejoined.

"He warned me off Stedleigh domain," Tom said, "but I warned him off this land; and if he sets foot on it before the twenty-fifth of September, I'll take him for a trespasser."

Mr. Clifford laughed a loud joyous laugh.

"You can't be in earnest, Williams?"

"I be in earnest, and I'll show Mr. Douglas I be in earnest too, if he comes here."

"It's the best thing I ever heard in my life," Mr. Clifford said, laughing again.

How the merry parson will enjoy telling that in every house he enters for the next week. It was too good a joke to escape repeating.

"What will you do with him, Williams? will you put him in the pound?" he asked.

"I'll show him what I'll do, if he comes, sir," Tom answered, laughing himself, notwithstanding his anger.

"He be foolish, sir, never mind him," Mrs. Williams said, "Go off to Cawton's, Tom, you'll be late, I tell you."

"Time enough, mother."

"Well, Williams, I am very sorry you and Mr. Douglas have had a difference, he is not an easy man to manage."

"Aye, he came up here as if he was going



to do something great, in letting my mother have the land at all," Tom said.

Mrs. Williams interrupted him, "Hush, lad, I'll tell Mr. Clifford;" and the good woman began, and gave a faithful account of her interview with Mr. Douglas the day before, as well as of his visit that evening.

Mr. Clifford sat patiently listening until it was all over.

"I am very sorry," he said, "you have always been most respectable people, I really grieve it is not in my power to do anything; but Mr. Douglas, you know,"—and he shook his head, to show how intractable he thought him.

"You'll not say I be looking for Cawton's land, sir," Tom said, as Mr. Clifford rose to go, "he might do me a hurt, you know, sir."

"Not I, certainly not. Do you think you shall like Cawton's farm as well as this, Mrs. Williams? it's larger, I know."

Tom's eye was on his mother.

"Oh yes, sir, after the first. Ye see it be

near the place I was born, and that's something. Besides, this hill side is very cold in winter; I had a touch of rheumatism last year from it."

"Rheumatism is a bad thing," Mr. Clifford said; and then he added, "I forgot to tell you something you will be sorry to hear, —our member, old Mr. Brownlowe, has had a paralytic stroke."

"I be very sorry, he was always a kind gentleman. I wonder who will stand in his place if he goes?" Williams asked.

"I don't know! your friend Mr. Douglas, perhaps," Mr. Clifford answered with a smile.

"Do you really think he would, sir?" Tom asked, and a gleam shot into his eye.

"I can't say; I was only jesting;" and he shook hands and went away.

Williams stood a moment thinking, and then, taking up his cap, went out, telling his mother he was going to see after Cawton's farm. When he reached the gate he found it open, and John leaning against it, looking down the hill path.

“I am going to look after Cawton’s land,” he said, pausing a moment by his brother, “and see Jack, lad,” he added, “we’ll split it, and have two farms in place of one.”

## CHAPTER XI.

## CHIT CHAT.

To men who have passed a certain age, a dinner party is a very pleasant thing. Men like dinner parties from youth up, for that matter : but after forty the enjoyment is doubled. It is very well for light young legs to be skipping off to the drawing-room after the ladies, and talking nonsense, older men care nothing for these things. They care very little for the ladies, when compared to racy after dinner anecdotes, washed down by good wine, and I will be bound to say the ladies care still less for them, very much preferring the flirting and light conversational grape shot of young

Jones, to the solemn face, or heavy fire of his bachelor uncle. Each to his place in this world ; the young nephew for the ladies, the uncle for the venison and the wine.

There was a party assembled round the Stedleigh dinner-table, one evening in the last week of August, that was not by any means indisposed to do justice to both. At the time we break in upon them, the venison had been eaten, and the wine was in full flow. The ladies had left the room, and were chirruping to each other dolorously in the drawing-room, as ladies do chirrup dolorously, until the gentlemen come up for coffee.

On one sofa sat Marion, with Grace Clifford, Marion certainly thinking of Harry Osborne, Grace probably thinking of——well, no matter, as the lady has made me a confidant, I am bound to respect her secret, but Marion's is no secret, therefore we may talk about it if we choose, as every one in Stedleigh has talked about it for the past three weeks. It is folly to say that Marion and Grace were good company to each other, they did their best to seem interested in a screen that Ma-

tion had been embroidering, and which was exhibited to Grace in its half-finished state. They turned it and twisted it, talked of the shades, the stitches, filling in, &c., and all the mysteries of such feminine work. There was a bird upon this screen to which Marion had given light blue eyes, by means of a thread of light blue silk, not because birds have commonly blue eyes, but probably because Harry Osborne had. Grace quarrelled with the eyes at once, and begged her friend to pick them out, and substitute black.

At another part of the room Miss Osborne was sitting by Miss Craig. Miss Craig was a young lady staying with her aunt, Mrs. Reddington, a fat old dame, who sat with Mrs. Douglas. Now, had Miss Craig given way to what she really felt, she would have enjoyed curling herself up on the sofa corner ways, until the gentlemen came up, for Miss Craig loved fun, and flirting, and in the present state of affairs neither were to be had. Miss Osborne was very erect, and not very talkative, and Miss Craig was trying to entertain her, which she did in a half sleepy draw-

ling way, with her eyes fixed on the door. At last to her relief Mrs. Douglas called Miss Osborne to ask her something Mrs. Reddington wanted to know respecting a bazaar, which Miss Osborne, who was great in bazaars, as well as all other charity news, could perhaps tell her. When Miss Osborne had gone, Miss Craig, instead of indulging herself by yielding to her curling-up desires, got up and took a chair by Grace and Miss Douglas.

“It is very dull sitting here, such a beautiful evening Miss Douglas ; what would you say to a stroll on the lawn ?” she said.

It was a grand thought. There was the bright green turf, the shady trees, and garden seats, inviting them ; they caught at it in a moment. Mrs. Douglas came over, in answer to a signal from Marion.

“You will come, mamma, won’t you ?” Marion cried, always ready for Mrs. Douglas’s society.

“What am I to do with my guests my dear, how could I get Mrs. Reddington to the lawn ?” and she glanced round with a look

which would have been a laugh, if Miss Craig had not been there.

"Oh, we shall get her out," that young lady said. "Never mind, Mrs. Douglas, we can put her on a seat, and if you leave her alone, she will be asleep in five minutes, she always sleeps at home after dinner," and if Mrs. Douglas scrupled to laugh, Miss Craig certainly did not.

Hats, cloaks, and shawls were procured, and the whole party were soon under weigh, the three young ladies in front, with Mrs. Douglas and Miss Osborne coming up behind, flanking fat Mrs. Reddington. They heard the sound of voices and laughter from the dining-room windows, as they came out, loud laughter and merry, for the party within were enjoying one of Mr. Clifford's stories. A capital one it was, and well told, but not a parson's story I am free to confess, although there would have been no great harm in it, if it had come from any one else at the table, but from Mr. Clifford's lips, the chronicles of a rollicking, racing week, did not sound well. However, the story was a good one, and



his hearers laughed at it, and Mr. Clifford laughed himself likewise.

"Was that after your ordination," Mr. Reddington asked. "Come Clifford, tell the truth, was it after it, and how long?"

"Oh, a month or two before it, not after it," Mr. Clifford said, with a laugh in his eye, and laying down the glass he had just emptied.

"A month before, or a month after," the admiral said laughing, "out with it."

"Pooh! you are as bad as a cross-examining barrister, Admiral; suppose it was a month after, what harm?"

Mr. Clifford's bright hazel eyes, went glancing round the table, and he laughed so jovially, that they all joined in his mirth, and the sound reached the ears of the ladies as they stepped daintily across the lawn. How the man enjoyed himself at that comfortable board, while his son was working as hard as a galley-slave at Ballaret.

"I say it was a devilish good story that," Fred Osborne remarked in an under tone; "but by Jove he is a rum parson, I think the daughter would make a better one, she is

great upon schools. I dropped a word about them at The Cliff the other day, and she gave me a lecture on the subject, which I forget."

"Like many another lecture you got, Fred, as well as that," Harry said, puffing vigorously at his cigar, while Douglas and Fred puffed likewise.

It was to enjoy the pleasure of this said smoke, that they had stayed away from the drawing-room so long.

"So you bought young Hensley's hunter I hear Douglas," Harry said, "I suppose it was with a view to winter, eh?"

"Yes, I think I'll have a run or two with the hounds. He's a capital horse, I gave Hensley a hundred and fifty guineas for him."

"I wonder he sold him."

"So did I, but he tells me he is going away in the winter, and has no use for him. His uncle and he don't get on well, I think."

"Whose uncle, Douglas, the horse's?" Frederick Osborne asked, removing his cigar to laugh.

"Confound your catches, Fred, but you have

so much of the law in you, you can't help it. I suppose, I meant Hensley's uncle, of course."

"Well, my uncle Sir George and I don't get on well either, but my aunt and I do capitally. You ought to come to London, Harry, to see your aunt, you are not the best of nephews."

"Perhaps I may, before things are wound up here," Harry answered; "but Douglas and I are going to Scotland."

"I'm sorry I am not going with you; you'll have first rate shooting there. Is it near the moors?"

"What, Inchcauldie?" Douglas said. "It belongs to a cousin of mine, and from all I can hear it's all moor."

"Well that's very pleasant in the shooting season, but it must be the deuce's own place the rest of the year."

"Oh, well they like it?"

"Who are they?" Harry asked; "I thought your cousin was a bachelor."

"No, a widower with a daughter."

"A fine tall Scotch girl, I'll be bound," Frederick observed laughing.

"Likely, but I have never seen her since she was a child, and then she had red hair."

"I don't like red hair," Harry said, shrugging his shoulders.

"Don't you? well may be it's golden by this time, like Marion's," Archie answered, laughing.

"By Jove, there are the ladies," Frederick Osborne interrupted. "They have come to give us a hint, that it's time we made our appearance."

The young men looked out, and there they were, sailing along as if quite innocent of the temptation they carried about with them. Yet I am doubtful if they were entirely innocent; Miss Craig certainly was not, for she planned the walk for no other purpose. Since the mountain would not go to Mahomet, Mahomet was coming very near to the mountain.

Archie and Harry were the first to appear on the lawn; of course the latter joined Marion, and they dropped back a little and a little, until they nearly lost the party altogether. Miss Douglas and Harry had an undoubted right to do this, but neither of the

two ladies left had any such right towards Archie, so they divided him honestly, and walked along together. Yet I do not think the division was altogether honest, for Miss Craig certainly absorbed more than a fair share of the conversation, while Grace had only a fair share of the walking. They took a few turns round the terraces, before Frederick Osborne joined them, then they went down by the lake, and wandered along its margin.

"This is really a beautiful place Mr. Douglas," Miss Craig remarked, as they stopped to look at a long reach through the trees at the other side of the lake; "I would not wonder at any one who envied you the possession of it."

"But I never shall possess it," Archie answered, quietly. "It belongs to my sister."

"Indeed," Miss Craig said, with a surprised rising of her eyebrows.

"Yes, it came by my father's first wife."

"It will belong to that gentleman over yonder with Miss Douglas, some day soon," Frederick interposed. "He is the son of my father's elder brother, and has taken all the

luck from Douglas and me. Condole with us, Miss Craig."

"Not all the luck surely, Osborne," Douglas said, with a smile, "when he has left us these two fair ladies."

"You are right Archie, with the ladies on our side, and at our side, we can bid fortune defiance. Now I flatter myself Miss Clifford is particularly on my side, she is to teach me school keeping, and gardening, I must try to be an apt pupil."

Whether Osborne saw that his allusions to Grace annoyed Douglas or not, it would be difficult to say, but he was always firing shots at her in his presence. The school and garden arrangement made Archie face round suddenly towards Grace. At the moment she was in a state of nervous distress, which his look heightened, and she could only say, "Oh, Mr. Osborne." Her protest was received with smiles by Fred and Miss Craig, and with no smile at all by Douglas.

"It is a fact I assure you, I am to get a patch of rock from my uncle to begin on, and carry the clay with which I mean to cultivate

my flowers upon my back in baskets," Frederick went on to say.

"And when Miss Clifford climbs your rock, you will promise not to throw her down, as the saint in the song did Kathleen," Miss Craig remarked, as she hummed, not unmusically, a line or two of the verses.

"Go on, go on," both gentlemen cried, "a song would be delightful in the open air."

"Wait until we get indoors, and you shall have one. Meantime just stop a moment, Mr. Osborne, and see the beauty that you have before you."

Osborne so called on did stop; Douglas strolled on with Grace.

"Did she do that purposely?" Osborne thought, watching his companion's face instead of the view. Yes, she did, and confessed it boldly.

"I stopped because I thought it a charity to let that girl escape, you were teasing her so," she said with a smile.

Osborne laughed, "If I had tried to tease you, what would you have done?"

"Teased you in return," was the quick rejoinder.

"Well, tease me now Miss Craig, I like to be teased."

And so they went laughing and chatting down the lake side.

Douglas was on in advance, and took good care to keep so, even crossing the bridge to put the water between them.

"What does Mr. Osborne mean about gardening, Grace, and your teaching him?" Archie asked at last, after having first determined he would take no notice of it, for what was it to him, he argued, as he had argued before, when wanting to convince himself it did not signify to him, whether Grace liked Frederick or not. Now he was convinced she did like him, and asked about the gardening because he could not help it.

"I don't know what he means, except to worry me, he's always worrying me," Grace answered. "Does he ever worry Marion, or is it only me he selects?"

"Marion does not encourage him," Archie said without looking at her.

Grace glanced round at him. His eyes were fixed on right before, as if watching



something far away. Did he mean that she encouraged Frederick; his words seemed to imply it, and more even than his words, his manner.

“Do you think I encourage him, Archie?”

He hesitated, he scarcely liked to put it in plain words that he did, which was actually the case, for at the moment he was angry enough to think anything, yet not angry in the true meaning of the word. According to his own reasoning, he was only annoyed to see a friend so silly, as to lay herself open to the sting of Frederick's sarcastic ridicule. Having mentally talked himself round to this notion, he said after a moment,

“Well Grace, I really think it almost seems as if he had something to go on. Did you promise to give him gardening lessons?”

“Certainly I did not,” Grace answered. “He made some jest about it, at which I laughed, I remember, and now he says I promised. Did it vex you Archie?”

Grace looked questioningly in her companion's face. She knew he was annoyed, and asked the question, in her direct woman's

way of coming to a point, without exactly thinking what the supposition involved. Therefore, she said at once, "Did it vex you Archie?" And Archie said, "no," which was not just the truth.

"I wish he would go back to London?" Grace observed presently. "We never had anything of this kind until he came to The Cliff. When is he to leave?"

"Soon I believe, I think he finds it dull. However, he is a good-natured pleasant fellow, only a little given to nonsense with ladies at times," Archie said, getting into good humour again, and becoming quite amiable towards Frederick, when Grace wished him back in London.

"I don't know about his good-nature; it is not good-natured to laugh at people."

"He will soon be away," Archie answered. "Indeed, we shall all soon be away, and you must learn to look kindly on your absent friends."

Archie looked round at Grace. He hoped to catch some sign of surprise, or concern in her face, but she betrayed neither.

"Marion told me you would not be long from home," was all she said.

"Then Marion was speaking of it ; I thought I had the first of the news." He paused, and then asked, "Will you miss me, Grace?"

"Surely, I shall," she answered, her cheek flushing a little.

"I shall miss you too, miss you very much. Would you write to me while I am away, or if I wrote to you, would you answer?"

This was far more than he had intended to say, but that flush of hers enticed him into it.

"It would be odd perhaps," she said, hesitating, and flushing again ; "I don't think papa would like it. Shall I ask him?"

"No, no," Archie exclaimed, quickly. "It is better not to write perhaps, I will write to Miss Osborne, and you shall see my letters. I shall tell her to shew them to you."

"And you will tell us what your cousin is like?"

"Who told you I had a cousin, Grace?"

"Marion did."

"Well yes, of course I have a cousin, and I shall fill my letters about her, if it pleases you. You ladies are always curious about each other."

"Nonsense Archie."

"Nonsense is not a polite word, Grace," Archie said in mock reproval.

A loud whistle, and then another, came across the lawn.

"There, they will be crying, 'stole away,' after us, if we don't make haste indoors."

They turned, and hurried back, not talking much by the way; Archie could afford to be silent, he had said enough, perhaps more than enough already, certainly more than was either wise, or right, if, as he told himself again, and again, he was not in love with Grace Clifford. He was thrown into her society, he admired, and liked her, that was all; with liking, or friendship even, and admiration it must stop. His mother probably would not approve of it, his father certainly would not; any step in the direction of matrimony with Grace Clifford, would bring them into collision at once. The thing was

not to be thought of, must not be thought of, in fact ; therefore, all that little chit chat about the letters, and Grace, being sorry at his going away, was to mean nothing at all. So Archie kept telling himself all the way home, yet if it really did mean nothing, it should never have been said. It might mean nothing to him, yet have a strong meaning to Grace ; she was not likely to weigh and measure and question as he did, she would accept it without a doubt, think over it, and dream over it, if she thought, or dreamt of him at all.

## CHAPTER XII.

HELEN DOUGLAS. THE RED SPOT ON THE  
MAP.

It was about four o'clock in the day of the thirty-first of August when the railway train that brought Mr. Douglas, Archie, and Harry Osborne to Inchcauldie, puffed into a small town that lay within about a mile of their destination. They had not named the precise time they might be expected, consequently when the three travellers stepped out on the platform there was no one awaiting their arrival.

"We shall want some trap to carry our luggage," Harry said, as he alighted.

"Never mind, Wilson will see to that,"

Mr. Douglas answered. "Here Wilson," he continued, addressing his servant, who having just scrambled out of a second-class carriage, was making his way towards his master, you will see to the luggage, and get it on to Inchcauldie, we are going to walk."

"Very well, sir," Wilson answered, dropping back, and the party started at once.

It was a fine evening for a walk, and as they got out of the town, and skirted along the hill-side where Inchcauldie lay, the brisk mountain air came sweeping in light puffs, bringing with it the smell of the heather. Mr. Douglas drew a long breath and smiled.

"There's Scotch strength in that breeze, Harry. It's better than salt water," he said.

Harry laughed, "We differ on that point, Mr. Douglas : but I suppose we shall agree in this, that this hill is dreadfully stiff."

"Have you lost your breath already, Harry," Archie asked.

"No ; but I hope we have not lost our way. This seems a queer road, to reach the place by."

"Leave that to me, my lad," Mr. Douglas answered. "You will be right before the house in ten minutes. It's far shorter than round by the road."

They were in the heather now, climbing the face of the hill, but keeping in a slanting direction, Mr. Douglas in front leading the way.

Not in ten, but fifteen minutes, they turned a twist in the hill, and clambering over a fence stood within view of the house. It was a low building of white stone placed against the face of the hill, with a scanty plantation of larch and mountain fir behind it, and on either side a spread of brown heath. A straight avenue, flanked by short grass, that grew poor and ragged, where the heath had been cleared away, led to the entrance gate. A small flock of sheep were browsing on the grass, or through the adjoining heather, and a large sheep dog lay lazily dozing in the sun at a little distance. Archie and Harry paused a moment to take a glance at the place, rugged, brown, and bare as it appeared to them; and then followed Mr. Douglas, who



went along with a quick step towards the house.

Before they had time to reach it the hall-door opened, and their host, who had seen them through the windows, approached to welcome them. He was a tall man, of about sixty, with scanty grey hair straggling over his rather low wrinkled brow. His face was long and thin, it had been ruddy and fresh in youth, but when we see him only a faded colour remained, which stood out somewhat brighter on the prominent points of his strongly marked cheek bones. His teeth had fallen early, and his mouth, pinched and thin at all times, became still more drawn with advancing years. There was a peculiarly acute expression in Angus Douglas's thin lips, and his light blue eye had a stealthy sidelong way of looking ; always shifting under your glance, and then stealing back again to search your face furtively.

"Inchcauldrie is much changed, Archibald," Angus Douglas said as they walked towards the house after he had enquired for Mrs. Douglas and Marion.

"I should say it's not changed at all," the other answered.

"Oh, yes, I made the clearing wider, and I have got more sheep on it than when you were here last. It was my father managed it that time."

"You were always a better manager than your father," Mr. Douglas said, in a tone that meant to flatter. He had come to open diplomatic relations with his cousin, and thought it wise to be polite to his weaknesses.

"Aye," Angus answered, "but here we are at the house, and you must have something to eat. We expected you either to-day or to morrow, and we are not unprepared."

"He has killed the fatted calf, or the fatted sheep," Archie observed, giving Harry a knock in the ribs as he went in, and pointing with his thumb to the poor-looking animals scattered over the grass.

"Faith, and it was none of that flock he took, if it's fat," Harry answered.

Travelling is hungry work, and the sharp

mountain air had not tended to lessen the appetite of our travellers when they found themselves face to face with the good cheer Angus Douglas's hospitality had provided.

"Is Helen forthcoming?" Mr. Douglas of Stedleigh asked, attacking the cold meat vigorously.

"Aye, she is out somewhere about the place, we will go round presently and look for her."

"I would like to take a turn on the hill at any rate," Mr. Douglas answered, "I feel quite glad to have my foot on Scotch heather again."

"It's hungry air," Archie said, "I am as ravenous as a hawk."

"There is a brace of hawks then," Osborne observed, helping himself to some slices of beef, which he washed down with a draught of strong Scotch ale, and then the whole party sallied out on the hill.

"Helen is generally down here of an evening," Angus Douglas said, leading the way across the scanty grass, and down the slope

of the hill at the opposite side from that by which they had reached Inchcauldie.

"There is old Glenlare," Mr. Douglas said, pointing to a good sized white house in the valley below, half hidden by a thick plantation.

"That was the last foot of Douglas land my grandfather sold," Angus said; "and indeed nearly the last he had to sell except Inchcauldie."

"Who lives there now?" Mr. Douglas asked. "It used to be a pleasant house when I was here as a lad."

"Yes, it was always a pleasant house; but it fell to a girl when the old man died, and she married an Englishman. She would not marry at home, although she might if she liked; and so have carried the Scotch blood through."

"As you did, Angus."

"Yes; and as Helen shall do, too."

Mr. Douglas glanced at Archie. "Have you a husband settled for Helen then, Angus?"

"Aye!" he answered with a broad Scotch accent, "aye."

He moved on without saying anything more, while Archie and Harry exchanged a smile behind his back. It seemed an amusing notion, this matchmaking, according to his Scotch prejudices.

"Who are you thinking of for Helen, Angus?" Mr. Douglas asked.

"What?" the other said, as if he did not hear him.

"Who are you thinking of for Helen?" Mr. Douglas asked again.

"Well, I had my mind on Douglas of Kilfin. It would put a Douglas in Inchcauldie again."

"Humph!" Mr. Douglas said; "and what does Helen say?"

"Well, he is red-haired, you see; but as brave a lad as ever lived, though rough to look at."

"A bull terrier," Osborne whispered to Archie; and they laughed.

Mr. Douglas understood the whole thing in a moment, and did not trouble himself to get any more explicit information from his companion, from whom indeed explicit informa-

tion was not always to be had. They walked on a few minutes in silence, and then the subject of their conversation came slanting across the heath. Angus Douglas was the first to see her.

"There is Helen," he said.

She came along slowly, with her eye fixed on the party before her, but without accelerating her speed. She wore a dark dress and a plaid scarf round her shoulders, one end of which was thrown over her head in lieu of hat or bonnet. Her father and Mr. Douglas met her first. She held out her hand to the latter.

"Do you remember me, Helen?" he asked.

"Quite well," she said ; "you are not much changed."

That was pleasant. It was ten years since he saw her, and a man of sixty-five likes to be told he has not changed much in ten years.

"This is Archie," Mr. Douglas said, laying his hand on his son's shoulder. "Do you remember him also?"

"Not so well. You are welcome to Inch-cauldie," she said, holding out her right hand, while with her left she threw the end of her scarf off her head.

She seemed about twenty. Older by three years than Grace Clifford, younger by three years than Marion Douglas. She stood as it were between the two, but was far more beautiful than either. Tall, and rather large in figure for her age, she had the fair complexion so often seen in Scotland, the type of pure northern descent. The colour on her cheek was beautiful, and it went shading off into pure white, towards her ear. Her eyes were blue, bright and liquid, but wanting the darker shade we see in English girls sometimes.

Altogether, Helen's was a strikingly attractive face, and the attraction was completed when she smiled, and exposed a whole row of glittering white teeth in a mouth that just opened wide enough to shew them. She wore her hair rolled off her cheek; and two long curls falling on each shoulder,

rested on the breast of her dress. It was the hair Archie had called red, and at which Harry Osborne shrugged his shoulders. But Helen's hair was not red. It was a rich, bright, yellow, that glistened like gold when the sun shone on it, and grew pale again in the shade.

While Helen shook hands with Archie, Osborne stood looking at her. He followed her hand as she threw off the scarf end from her head, and watched the face it exposed with a feeling of surprised admiration. "By Jove, what a wife for a bull terrier," he thought, as Mr. Douglas followed Archie's introduction, by introducing Harry himself, and then the whole party turned and walked back to the house.

"What do you think of Inchcauldie, Archie?" Helen asked, as they went along. "It is ten years since you were here."

"It shall never be ten years again."

"Well, I hope not; but the next ten years will sober us all."



"The last ten has not sobered me, has it sobered you?"

"Not much," she said, with a smile. "But you never told me how you like Inchcauldie."

"Well," Archie answered, "I like it for old family recollections of course, and I dare say I shall like the shooting."

"That is a questionable opinion, Douglas," Osborne said, desirous of pushing his oar into the conversation. "But he is only half blood, Miss Douglas."

"Yes, very true," Helen said. "He cannot see Inchcauldie as I do. He has been reared away from it, while I have been reared on the mountain all my life."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, except that I have been in London for a few weeks, the two past seasons."

"You must come and see us at Stedleigh Helen; and then we shall try to make you forget Inchcauldie."

"I don't think I shall ever quite forget Inchcauldie; but I shall try and like

Stedleigh too. That is fair, is it not Mr. Osborne?"

"Quite fair, as fair as—"

"Stop, you are going to pay me a compliment, and I hate nonsense," she said quickly, almost abruptly.

"Well I beg your pardon, I shall not offend again."

"The truth had nearly escaped him for once, if you had not stopped him," Archie said, laughing at Osborne's disconcerted face.

"That is such an adroit compliment, I forgive you Archie," she said, with a smile; "and I shall reward you with a cup of coffee when we reach home."

They were just close to the hall door now, and waited for the two gentlemen who were slowly coming up behind; and they all went in together.

Angus Douglas led the way into the drawing-room, while Helen proceeded down the hall, from whence she appeared presently, carrying a silver cream ewer in her hand,

and followed by a servant bringing some hot bread for tea.

"I went to the dairy for the cream to ensure it should be good," Helen said, laying down the ewer. "You must come and see my dairy to-morrow, I look after it closely myself."

"Not altogether yourself though," Archie asked, as a vision of Mrs. Williams, busy amongst her milk pails rose before him.

"Oh no, Janet and I together. But Janet needs minding, and needs help too; and I give her both."

She sat by the table, pouring out the tea and coffee. Surely those white hands did not look like assisting in dairy work.

"Does your daughter know much of such things, Archibald?" Angus Douglas asked, in the most natural way in the world.

"Nothing whatever."

"Well, it's a pity not to make girls useful, especially where they are going to have a house of their own."

Mr. Douglas made no reply. The idea

was so utterly absurd. Angus Douglas with his narrow income, and still narrower notions, had no conception of Stedleigh. He had been accustomed to see his cousin in their youthful days with no better prospect than the Grange, which was somewhat beyond Inchcauldie, certainly; but not so much so, as to render it strange that the daughter of the one should do as the daughter of the other did. Angus in his simple ignorance thought it a pity that Marion should not have been made useful, so as to fit her for her new home duties.

"Do you like our Scotch bread, Mr. Douglas?" Helen asked, by way of changing the conversation.

"It is like old days come back again," he said, "when your father and I spent our summer holidays at Inchcauldie. We had good times then, I can assure you."

"That was in my grandfather's time. I recollect my grandfather quite well."

"But not our school days," Mr. Douglas rejoined, with grim mirth.

"Oh no," Helen said, and she laughed.

"There is many a day come and gone since then, Archibald," Angus Douglas observed, withdrawing Mr. Douglas' attention from Helen, who turned away her head, and began talking to Archie.

"Well they have not been bad days ; neither of us have much complaint to make against the world."

"Aye," Angus said, meditatively, and then after a pause he asked. "What kind of sheep do you graze now at the Grange, Archibald?"

"We have better sheep at the Grange and Stedleigh, than you have out there, Angus," Mr. Douglas answered, pointing towards the window.

"Aye, but ours are sweet to eat, you will say that to-morrow, I think," and then the two old men pushed their chairs nearer to the fire, for the mountain air was chill at Inchcauldie, and Helen had had a fire lighted for her guests.

"There are a great many sheep round here I think, at least there used to be. Do they keep sheep down at Glenlure?"

Mr. Douglas enquired ; "they did formerly, I know."

"Everything is changed there now. Since Nelson got possession of it, he keeps nothing on it. They come over once a year, and except then, the place is shut up."

"He is a wild fellow I fear. Has she got a good settlement?"

"None at all. He ran away with her a week after she came of age."

"Then he can do what he likes with the place?"

"Yes, so I hear. Are you thinking of buying?" and the acute blue eyes of his questioner were fixed right on his face.

Angus Douglas knew as well as his companion knew it, that Mr. Douglas, of Stedleigh, never came all the way to Scotland for nothing. In fact, he had more than a suspicion of what he had come for. He remembered many years ago when Mr. Douglas had married Miss Westbrooke, that he came to Inchcauldie on business to his father, which business had failed owing to Angus having refused his consent

to the proposed arrangement. He guessed this visit had a like purpose, which guess was strengthened by his visitor's curiosity respecting Glenlure. All this was passing through his mind while he waited for Mr. Douglas's reply; but his cousin, instead of giving a direct answer to his question, met it with a counter one.

"Perhaps you are thinking of buying, yourself?"

"Aye," Angus Douglas said, slowly, "but Nelson might ask too much for it, though it ought to be joined to Inchcauldie. It would make a nice bit of land to go with Helen. Land is better than silver; silver is given to melting."

He tapped his snuff box thoughtfully, and taking a pinch himself, offered one to his companion. The action reminded Mr. Douglas of the Admiral's friendly overtures.

"No thank you, I never snuff," he said, declining the civility. "Do you think of adding Glenlure to Inchcauldie, Angus?"

"I don't say that, Archibald. It would take more money than I have."

"How do you know that? Have you made an offer?"

"Oh, I know the value of things, and so does Mr. Nelson, wild as he is," he answered, evasively.

There was nothing to be made out of that, so Mr. Douglas let it drop.

"You really intend Helen to marry that bear's cub at Kilfin," he said, changing the subject.

"Bear as he is, he is good Douglas blood, and a brave lad, if not a handsome one."

"Yes; but women like handsome lads, sometimes, Angus," Mr. Douglas answered, in a half jesting tone.

"You were not ill-looking yourself, Archibald, and you made a good thing of it."

"Nor were you Angus," Mr. Douglas answered, by way of returning the compliment.

"Well, I did not get much money, but I got Scotch blood in and in, and that was something."

Mr. Douglas differed with him, but did not say so; and turned the conversation into a



new channel by asking, "How he thought Archie had grown up?"

"As fine a lad as ever a Douglas need wish to be," was the reply; and to those who knew Angus' strong Douglas prejudices, that was more than common praise.

"The light-haired young man is going to marry your daughter, I believe."

Mr. Douglas said "yes;" and so the talk went on until bed-hour, without once touching again on Inchcauldie or Glenlure.

By twelve o'clock the whole household was in bed, and all the lights in the house out except Mr. Douglas's. The narrow accommodation of Inchcauldie did not allow of dressing rooms; and Mr. Douglas sat in a comfortable chair by a table in his bed-room conning over some papers he had taken from his portmanteau, that lay open beside him. These papers, on which he was so intently engaged, were the same musty deeds and letters that we saw at Stedleigh, and half covering them was the open map, the study of which, Admiral Osborne had interrupted. The forefinger of Mr. Douglas's left hand

rested on the red spot in the corner, while the forefinger of his right passed slowly round a patch of green that lay next the red, until the two fingers met on the border of those red and green spots ; and then he leant back thinking. Presently he pushed away the map, and, rising, walked to the window, opened it and looked out.

A broad spread of brown heath, with the poor grass in the centre, then, further away, the water of the loch shining under the moonlight, and Nelson's white house down the hill side, surrounded by its plantation of larch and fir, was all that met Mr. Douglas's sight ; but such as it was his eye wandered covetously over it. He was willing to pay good English money, gathered from the rents of Stedleigh, for that old home of his ancestors. He had not much uneasiness about Glenlure, Nelson would sell it, he was sure of that. Indeed, he had never thought about it at all, until he came to Inchcauldie, and then the knowledge of Nelson's necessities, and his power to sell, put the idea into his head. He would see to it when he went back to England.

Angus Douglas would be glad to purchase too, he had said as much ; but then Angus had not money enough, that he had said also ; or, at least, he had led him to infer it. He had got a legacy lately by the death of an old maiden relative. How much it was Mr. Douglas did not know, not much probably ; but Angus was a careful money-gathering man, and might have money saved. He owned, besides Inchcauldie, part of the neighbouring village, and some houses in Edinburgh. The yearly produce of the whole was not large, still he might have hoarded something out of it.

Mr. Douglas suspected Angus had made an offer for Glenlure ; but it was only suspicion. If so the offer clearly had not been considered sufficient. He would make an offer for it without telling Angus, but that would all do presently. The chief question now was, would Angus Douglas sell Inchcauldie ? If he would, Mr. Douglas was disposed to treat liberally with him, to give more than he had offered Angus's father, which offer he had been willing to take, had not Angus stepped

between and said, no. Would he say "no" again. He had no right to stand between him and Inchcauldie; if things had not gone wrong between Mr. Douglas's grandfather and his elder son, Inchcauldie would have been his in spite of Angus Douglas, but the son and the father had quarrelled about his marriage. Inchcauldie had run out of entail, and the old man in his wrath left it from the elder to the younger brother. The elder brother was Mr. Douglas' father, and the younger the father of Angus; therefore Mr. Douglas argued Inchcauldie ought to have been his. To give it with Helen Douglas to Douglas of Kilfin, would be robbing him of his just rights, and sending the property that should belong to his branch of the Douglas's, into another. He would reason it over with Angus, and try to bring him to see with his eyes, a matter by no means easy, for Angus had been accustomed to see with his own eyes for a great many years, and was not a man to be led with bit and bridle.

Even now, while Mr. Douglas thought and plotted, a letter lay on Angus's dressing-table

which he had written in consequence of the conversation they had by the fire, showing that he profited by the notion he had caught of Mr. Douglas's intention to buy Glenlure.

Mr. Douglas was a resolute, astute man, nevertheless, Angus was one too many for him that time. He had calculated on his cousin's want of money to make an offer that would tempt Mr. Nelson to part with Glenlure. He was a mole digging in the dark, trying to find out by guessing the much or the little that Angus was possessed of, and finally deciding that he could afford to wait until he had got back to Stedleigh before he applied to Mr. Nelson.

He did not know that Angus Douglas had offered every farthing of money he could command for the place, or that that offer had come within five hundred pounds of what Mr. Nelson demanded; nor did he know that in the very next room to him lay a letter to go by the first mail in the morning, directing Angus's solicitors to sell one of the Edinburgh houses to make up the necessary sum, and not

to lose a moment in agreeing to Mr. Nelson's terms. Angus was determined to add Glenlure to Inchcauldie, and to obtain that nice bit of land for Helen, which he had spoken of, when he reflected that silver was given to melt.

Mr. Douglas could not see through the stone wall that divided him from his host, when he wrote that letter: and so he went on planning and devising, as men do plan and devise, although they cannot see the next step beyond them.

Douglas of Kilfin, that was the sorest drop of all; but even in that there was a hope. Helen did not like him, and Helen looked as if she had a will of her own, as in truth she had, and a pretty strong one too. Something might be worked out that way: but let it be done how it would, Inchcauldie he would have. He had promised his father on his deathbed to leave no stone unturned to win it back. Independently of that promise, he wished to win it back for its own sake. He wished to see his son at least, sure of being what he ought to be himself by right of elder-

ship, Douglas of Inchcauldie. If Helen married her cousin, Inchcauldie must sink to nothing. Her son would be "Douglas of Kilfin," not "Douglas of Inchcauldie," and Inchcauldie would fall in as an appendage to the Douglasses of Kilfin, only worth to them what it brought in yearly income. Then another thought came into Mr. Douglas's mind, something he would fall back on if all other offers failed. As that thought crossed him, he turned away from the window, and muttered to himself half-aloud "Why not Archie?"

He went to the table and laid his finger on the little red spot in the corner of the map that represented Inchcauldie, the Naboth's vineyard of the rich Ahab: and as he did so he muttered again, "Why not Archie?"

## CHAPTER XIII.

## ARCHIE'S LETTER.

THE drawing-room windows at The Cliff are thrown open. In one of them Admiral Osborne is sitting sniffing the sea-breeze that comes in along with the tide, while he talks to Grace Clifford, who has come that morning to The Cliff, ostensibly to see the Admiral, but in reality to look after a letter from Archie Douglas. Grace is kneeling on a cushion by the window watching the sea through the Admiral's glass, and the old man is bending over her with a kind fatherly smile, his hand on her head.

"This is a grand glass, Admiral," Grace



said, with her eye still to it. "I can count one, two, three, four; eleven fishing boats; and I can see the faces of the men in them."

"Can you see them whistling, eh, Grace?" the Admiral asked.

Grace, accustomed to the old man's jokes, laughed. "No, not quite that," she answered.

"Can't you. Well, I believe it's the wind that's whistling, and not the fishermen. We'll have a rattling breeze before night."

He was interrupted by the appearance of Miss Osborne, who came in from the garden in great tribulation, with her apron full of rose leaves.

"See all my poor roses!" she said, opening her apron, and showing its contents. "They are dropping to pieces."

"They can't last for ever, Charlotte, you'll have more next year;" her father said, by way of consolation.

Grace withdrew herself from the glass, and came round to shake hands with Miss Osborne.

"My roses are all falling too," she said.

"Jane and I gathered a whole heap of leaves yesterday."

She had been waiting half an hour to see Miss Osborne, and thought she was busy with her housekeeping. If she had only known she was gathering rose leaves in the garden—

"What are you going to do with them, Grace?" Miss Osborne asked.

"Jane has put them in a great china bowl, and she intends to keep them in the drawing-room," Grace answered, still thinking of the letter, yet afraid to ask about it. "I was glad to learn from the Admiral that you had heard from Harry," she said after a moment, hoping her allusion to him would lead up to Archie's letter, if there was one.

"Yes, he quite likes the place. He says there is plenty of shooting, and he tells me Miss Douglas is very handsome."

"Pooh, he has no right to be talking of girls being handsome. What do you say Grace? He can't be running after two frigates at once," the Admiral observed.

"Why, no," Grace said laughing. "Yet

you told me a story the other evening, where one English ship chased and caught two French ones.

"Bravo Grace. But then you know, my dear, a ship is feminine, and that makes the difference."

"Let Grace alone father," Miss Osborne said, "I have a letter to shew her from a friend of hers."

"Aye Grace, Archie has appointed you inspector of his correspondence with Charlotte, so I need not interfere."

Grace laughed, and Miss Osborne, with the rose leaves still gathered in her apron, fumbled through the pocket of her dress for Archie's letter, Grace standing as demure as a mouse at the corner of the table, with her very fingers tingling to get it. At last Miss Osborne came upon it, and handed it across to her.

"There, you can sit down and read it, Archie says he promised you an account of Inchcauldie and his cousin, and begged me to let you see it."

"I think I shall go out to look at your

stripped rose trees, and I can read this at the same time," Grace said.

"Very well my dear," Miss Osborne observed, and Grace escaped without opposition to the garden. There on a seat sheltered by the corner of the house, she opened Archie's letter.

"I wonder what he says of his cousin," she thought as she unfolded it, and began to read. There was a good deal about their journey, a short description of Inchcauldie, and then a few words about Helen. She was very beautiful, quite different to any one he had ever seen, and he was most anxious that she would come to Stedleigh, as he was sure his mother and Marion would be delighted with her. Grace did not like his wishing Helen would come to Stedleigh. She had dreaded that Scotch visit from the first, now she dreaded it still more. Why should Archie wish Helen Douglas to come to Stedleigh, unless he liked her? Well, yes, he liked her, she was sure of that, but then there was no great harm in his liking her, and even if he only liked her as a cousin,

it was very natural, he should desire to see her at Stedleigh. After his mention of Helen, he said a little of the shooting, and then came the end of the letter, which was all about herself. "I promised Grace Clifford an account of my doings here, will you let her have a look at my letters second-hand if she cares to read them? Give her my love, and tell her I have not forgotten any of my old Stedleigh friends, in the new faces I have met at Inchcauldie."

Grace laid down the letter with a pleased smile. She did not mind about Helen Douglas now, even if she came to Stedleigh. Archie had been true to his friendship with her in spite of Helen's beauty, and friends they should always be. Grace also used the specious words, which sometimes cover so much, and sometimes mean so little. Let her see his letters second-hand if she cared to read them, Grace's innocent brain read this sentence upside down, by supposing that perhaps Archie did think she would not care to read his letters, and sent an assurance through Miss Osborne that she

very much cared to read them, which made Archie smile. The truth being that he wrote it to Miss Osborne, to give things between him and Grace an easy indifferent appearance.

Grace read the letter over again. She passed by quite carelessly the remarks about Miss Douglas, she had ceased to fear her influence since she read Archie's closing sentences, and now when she came to those sentences again, she read them twice. All those things might mean nothing to Archie, as he had told himself they meant nothing the night he spoke to her in Stedleigh, domain. But they did mean something to Grace, and she would not even try to persuade herself that they did not. What it was all to end in she never stopped to think. The future was misty and uncertain, but it did not bear the same aspect to her that it bore to Archie, when now and then a thought of his father crossed him as it had crossed him in Stedleigh, and made him say to himself, that Grace and he were to be friends, and friends only.

Archie had never opposed his father, and probably never would oppose him. He had no idea of marrying Grace against his father's wish, nor indeed of marrying her at all, as he assured himself; but if any matrimonial project of his father's clashed with his freedom of choice, there was no saying what he might do. There were elements of opposition slumbering in the young man's nature, that if once stirred, would not be easily set at rest. No one knew this better than Mr. Douglas, even when he thought of playing a game for Inchcauldie, against his wily antagonist Angus Douglas, with Archie for a trump card.

All this, however, was beyond Grace's ken, and she was still busy with the letter, and her thoughts of Archie, when she heard the Admiral calling her name. Hurriedly thrusting Archie's letter into her pocket, Grace rose, and went to meet him.

He had just entered the garden gate, and was coming along the path through the

flower beds. He always walked slowly and with a halt, in consequence of a shot received many years before, which shattered some of his smaller ankle bones, and his limping step gave him an appearance of feebleness, which almost justified Mr. Douglas in forgetting the little span of five years that separated them.

"What would you say to a walk, Grace?" the Admiral said, as she joined him. "If you are not too tired, I would like you to come down on the beach with me."

"Not at all too tired," she said, bending her shoulder towards the Admiral, to lean on. "It is nice and sunny, and would be a lovely day only for the wind."

"Aye, the wind is coming in strong with the tide," he said, placing his hand on Grace's proffered shoulder. "Don't let me lean too heavily on you. I miss Harry's strong arm, this week past."

They went out of the garden gate, down the short avenue to the beach, the steps of the young girl suiting themselves to the slow motion of her companion. The



tide was coming rolling in upon the shingles, the waves tipped with white foam.

"I don't think the poor fishermen will catch much to day," the Admiral said, watching the spray rising from the waves, as they struck the rocks.

"I am afraid not," Grace answered. "However they had a great take yesterday."

"That makes matters even, you think. But tell me what does Archie say in his letter?"

The question was abrupt, and Grace coloured. She was thinking of Archie, while she was talking of the fishermen, and she felt as if she had been caught.

"Nothing particular. He is quite pleased with his visit so far. He does not say a word of coming back."

"Of course not. Harry tells me they will stay a month he thinks."

"A month," Grace repeated, it seemed a very long time to her.

"It's an inland place. Harry says there is not a drop of salt water in sight," the Admiral said.

"You would not like to be there then, Admiral?"

"Not much, Grace. I love the sea, although it cost me my two gallant boys. They were two as fine fellows as ever trod the deck of a ship," he said, regretfully. "Still I like the salt water, and although I left the service when my lads were gone, I am like an old crocodile, that creeps out of the river, only to crawl along the bank.

## CHAPTER XIV.

## INCHCAULDIE.

INCHCAULDIE had not much beauty in itself. It was a long stretch of brown hill side, with plenty of game crouching amongst the heather. But the view, which was to be had in the early morning, from the height above the house, more than compensated for the want that struck the eye at first sight. From the summit or peak of the hill could be seen the country for miles round, rising or sinking in undulating slopes. Green meadow land, mixed with bright yellow fields, from which the grain of a rather late harvest, had in some places

not been removed. Through the pasture land and corn fields, the winding waters of the loch, glittering in the early sun, made its way to the ocean, receiving as it went along, the streams from a number of tributary rivers. At the back forming a dark setting to the whole, was the heathery hill side, with Angus Douglas's house upon the face of it, which, seen from the valley below, looked like a white spot dotted against the mountain.

An hour after daybreak, some three or four mornings succeeding the arrival of our party at Inchcauldie, Mr. Douglas, Archie, and Harry Osborne, with guns on their shoulders, shot pouches, and game bags on their backs, and followed by four thin limbed Scotch dogs, with a bare legged Scotchman holding them in leash, stood on the brow of the hill. To Archie and Harry the view presented a wide spread of beautiful landscape, but to Mr. Douglas it displayed something very different. Along the line of mountain, sloping from its foot to the edge of the loch, where it wound away

towards the open country, lay the broad acres of land, named in that old deed of settlement on Janet Mackenzie and her heirs, which Mr. Douglas had pored over in the library at Stedleigh. Green, blue, or yellow dots upon a map, represented to him then, all the fair prospect now spread under his eye, while his foot was pressing the ragged heathery back ground of the picture, then only distinguished by a small red spot on the corner of the map.

"Every acre of that was Douglas's land once, Archie," he said, moving on as he spoke, and leading the way along the hill side. "Yet I think I like Inchcauldie better than all the rest put together, I suppose because it has stayed with us till the last."

"It's not a bad shooting box," Archie answered, evidently not touched by his father's love for the place.

A foolish hare, roused by the sound of their voices, started out at Archie's feet, and darted off through the heather.

"Here goes for you," Archie cried, and

fired. The poor hare fell dead, and was picked up by Osborne.

"By Jove Archie, what a shot you are," he cried admiringly, as he crammed it into the game bag.

"Aye, I don't want silver bullets," Archie answered, with a laugh, and bounding through the heather, he soon lost all remembrance of the Douglas lands in the excitement of the sport.

To shoot game had been the sole motive of the young men's visit, and they certainly carried it out to the letter. Sometimes Mr. Douglas accompanied them, and sometimes he did not, Angus Douglas never did. He was too much occupied looking after his farm, and was not a good shot; but he was always glad to see his guests come in with well filled game bags, although the slaughter must have far exceeded the consumption at Inchcauldie. Angus however found a market for the overplus, in a neighbouring town. He was not the man to let anything go to waste, that, as he expressed it, brought

in silver, and cost him neither powder or shot.

There was a fresh breath in the mountain air, a bracing hungry breath too, and Archie and Harry often found it necessary to apply to the package of sandwiches, cut by the white hands of Helen Douglas, which they always carried as a defence against starvation, as Archie said. Seated on a stone or a clump of heath, the two young men would enjoy the sandwiches, a good smoke, and a draught of clear water from a stream that tumbled down the hill, while they sat talking of Stedleigh, or The Cliff, Grace Clifford, or Helen Douglas. When the day's sport was over, and they had done justice to the comfortable dinner Helen's care always provided for them, they generally left Mr. Douglas and his host to the enjoyment of each other's company, and walked about the hill, or took a row on the loch, accompanied by Helen Douglas.

As the evening began to fall they came home to tea, Helen wearing her scarlet plaid over her head, which hid the thick rolls

of her rich gold coloured hair. Nothing set off or increased the brilliant fairness of her complexion so much as this hair, with which contrasted eyebrows and eyelashes several shades darker. Helen was very beautiful, and she knew that she was so ; but her knowledge of it did not take the form of ridiculous affectation, by which so many lovely women lessen the effect of their loveliness. She was by far too wise to fall into such an error, yet at the same time she was perfectly conscious of her exterior advantages, and enjoyed to the full, the measure of admiration which they brought her.

On the return of Helen and her friends from their evening stroll, they generally found Mr. Douglas and his host sitting by the drawing-room fire, ready to enjoy the hot coffee, cakes, and nice fresh butter, that were sure to make their appearance as soon as the ramblers came indoors. And when Madge carried in the lights and the cakes, the younger members of the party would assemble round the table, leaving



their elders to entertain each other at the farther end of the room.

At no time, perhaps, was Helen seen to more advantage than when busied amongst her cups and saucers. Her dark, close fitting dress, suited well with her clear complexion, and was set off by a snow white collar, that sat prettily round a neck as white as itself. Her sleeves were edged with white cuffs, a gold chain, from which her watch was suspended, glittered against her dark dress, and still further relieved its sombre colour.

Life at Inchcauldie was new life to Archie, accustomed as he had been to see ladies literally living without exertion, dressed in silks, or decked out in muslin and ribbons, while a servant carried round the tea or coffee from chair to sofa. But at Inchcauldie Helen's white hands prepared the tea and coffee, and some of the cakes they eat even, had passed through the same active fingers. To her was due the sweetness of the butter, and the richness of the cream. For Janet would have been but a rough dairy-maid

without Helen's superintendence. At all this Archie had been at first surprised, and then pleased. "It was delightful to see women useful as well as ornamental," he said to Harry, and Harry nodded assent.

After a little, these bold intruders found their way into the dairy, and watched Helen skim the cream, or direct Janet in the butter-making, while Archie declared that she must come to Stedleigh and teach Marion how to manage a dairy. Helen laughed, and said she was afraid Marion was too much accustomed to be idle, to make a good pupil. "But suppose I teach you," she said.

"Or me," Harry suggested. "Teach me, Miss Douglas."

"Ah, no, you are my cousin's pupil," Helen rejoined.

"True," he said, and the blood came to his face. Helen bent over a bowl of cream, and appeared not to see it, and it escaped Archie altogether.

"There now," she cried, laughingly,

"come in to tea, and carry the cream for me, that's a good cousin," and she put the ewer in Archie's hand. "We will go through the kitchen, and tell Madge to send us in some cakes. Come, Mr. Osborne," she added, addressing Harry, "or I'll lock you in, and send the key to Marion."

Harry laughed slightly. "What would you do for cream for breakfast?" he asked.

"Ah, yes, you are right. I had better keep the key myself then."

Archie had gone out with the cream before Helen spoke, leaving her and Osborne alone in the dairy.

"I wish"—Harry said, and stopped.

"You wish what. You wish you had your tea, is it? Well keep with me," she said, smiling. "I have command of the teapot, as well as the dairy," and this queen of coquettes stepped out, and followed Archie into the house.

"She is beating out Grace, eh Archie?" Harry said at night, when they were smoking

a pipe comfortably in Archie's room, and the talk had turned on Helen.

"Grace is too old a friend to be beaten out easily, Harry."

"Friend, fiddlesticks," Harry answered, and went on smoking.

Archie said nothing more, the allusion to Grace having set him thinking how glad he would be to see her again, and that after all Stedleigh was a pleasanter place than Inchcauldie.

One evening, about three weeks after they had come to Inchcauldie, Helen, Harry, and Archie, had been out as usual. When they returned to the house, Mr. Douglas and his cousin were sitting together by the fire, the former with an open letter lying on his knee.

"Ah, letters from home," Archie and Harry cried in a breath, for the Stedleigh letters rarely came in the evening.

"Yes, I have had a letter from your mother, and there are some for you, my boy," Mr. Douglas said, handing Archie three.

"I may read them here, I suppose," he said, appealing to Helen, while Harry placed a chair at the table for her. Helen nodded.

"There's a letter for you too," Mr. Douglas said, reaching another to Harry.

Harry looked at the handwriting, and put it in his pocket.

"You are ashamed to seem in a hurry, Mr. Osborne," Helen laughed. "Ah, poor Marion, she thought you would go into an ecstasy, and break the seal the minute you got it."

She had got a mischievous way of worrying him, by constant allusions to his engagement, ever since the evening he coloured in the dairy.

"Why don't you attack Douglas?" Osborne said.

"He does not get special letters, at least that I know of," Helen answered, the smile going off her lip.

"Perhaps he gets special messages, though," Harry said, walking over to the fire.

Archie looked up quietly, but made no observation; and then went on reading his letters.

Helen poured out the tea and coffee in silence, and then Harry came back to the table, with his letter still unopened. Archie had read two of his, but he put the third in his pocket.

"Is that the letter with the special messages?" Helen asked, as she handed him a cup of tea.

Archie laughed. "No, there is nothing special about it," he said, drawing it out, and throwing it on the table. It is from Miss Osborne."

"You might read it, and let one hear the news from home," Harry said.

"If you were in a hurry for news, you would have read Marion's," Archie answered, who owed Harry a grudge for his remark about the special messages.

Mr. Douglas and his cousin still sat by the fire, where they took their coffee.

"Archie is a fine lad," Angus Douglas said, looking over towards the table. He

will be bringing you a daughter-in-law some of these days."

"He has time enough to think of that yet," Mr. Douglas answered; and then, turning the old man's flank, he asked, "When do you give Helen to Douglas of Kilfin, Angus?"

"It's time enough; she is in no hurry," Angus replied, sipping his coffee. "They say Stuart is coming to live in the old house," he observed, as he put the empty cup on the corner of the mantle-piece.

"I was down there to-day," Mr. Douglas answered, "and they are pulling down the porter's lodge to build a new one. By the by, a lodge is badly wanted at Inchcauldie Angus."

"What is the use of my putting stone and mortar together, and money so scarce. I can open the gate for myself."

"Well, if I owned the place, I'd put up a lodge."

"Aye, if you did, Archibald. But you see you have more money than I have. Indeed, I don't think Stuart has much money either;

and more fool he to spend it on such nonsense," he added, going away from the subject.

"It's no use," Mr. Douglas thought. "I must go at it direct;" and he went on talking of Mr. Stuart.

"We must have a song, to pass the evening," Helen said, pushing away her chair from the table, and going to the piano. "Come, Archie, you will sing a duet with me."

"Yes; if you will let my voice spoil yours," he said.

"Another compliment; and, like all compliments not a word of truth in it. You don't think your voice spoils mine?"

"How do you know what I think, Helen?" he asked, laughing.

"Archie, my boy, she has fathomed your little vanity," Osborne said, smiling, as he drew a seat to the piano.

Helen and Archie were tossing over some loose music, looking for a song.

"Here it is at last," she said; "you won't be afraid to venture on it, Archie? We sang it before."



Archie nodded, and taking the music from her, arranged it on the piano, standing at her shoulder while they sang. Osborne sat with his elbow on the piano, his hand against the side of his head, and his fingers carelessly run through his hair. Helen's voice was strong and sweet, and went well with the full tones of Archie's. She knew how to manage it to advantage, and was a capital musician, her father, with all his narrow notions, having taken care to place her at a good school in Edinburgh.

"Why don't you applaud us, Harry?" Archie asked, with a smile, when the duet was finished. "I think we did it beautifully."

"If we praise ourselves, we don't want applause from other people. Don't you think so, Mr. Osborne?" Helen said, running her fingers lightly over the keys.

"I agree with you Miss Douglas, although whether you need the applause or not I must offer it."

"I don't believe you heard a note," Archie said. "I was watching you all the time, and your thoughts were in the moon."

"Or in Marion's letter, that he has in his pocket," Helen suggested, laughing.

"I will applaud you, Helen," Mr. Douglas said from the fireplace. "I think you sang even better than usual to-night; and that is saying a good deal."

"Thank you, Mr. Douglas; I always believe your praise."

Mr. Douglas smiled, "But not every one else's, I suppose."

Helen laughed. "No: not every one else's, she said."

"Well, this praise is sincere and deserved. What do you say, Angus? How did you like the song?"

"It was not bad," he answered.

"Papa's commendations never go farther than that," Helen said, smiling; and she began playing a march.

A little after nine Archie looked at his watch.

"I am to be out on the hill early to-morrow, with my father," he said; "and I have some letters to write to-night. Will you excuse me, Helen."

“ You are always writing letters,” she said, “ But, there, go ; Mr. Osborne will be more polite ; he has no letters to write, I suppose ? ”

“ Even if I had,” Harry said, “ I would not leave you alone.”

“ Oh, but I would not be alone,” she answered, as Archie left the room. “ I could go over and join my father and Mr. Douglas at the fire, and talk about wheat and fat cattle.”

Osborne laughed. “ I am afraid you would be in extremity when you tried that,” he said.

“ Yes ; I think I would rather stay here and talk to you : but perhaps you, like Archie, would prefer writing letters.”

“ I think you said that to be contradicted,” Harry answered, with a smile.

“ Well, if I did, you should punish me by not contradicting it, or by not talking.”

“ I should not mind the last,” he said, “ if you talked, and let me listen.”

“ Come, Mr. Osborne, you are very gallant,” Helen answered, laughing and colour-

ing. But I want you to talk and to tell me about Stedleigh. Is it a very beautiful place?"

"Very beautiful, and very extensive. Mr. Douglas keeps it in admirable order."

"How insignificant poor Inchcauldie must seem to you and Archie?"

"No; I assure you I am delighted with Inchcauldie."

"You are very kind to say so; but I should like to see Stedleigh, and to become acquainted with my cousin. Indeed Mr. Douglas has asked me to go there at Christmas."

Osborne removed his hand from his head, and bent towards her.

"I should be delighted. You must come, Miss Douglas," he said, eagerly. And then, as if remembering himself, he added, "they would all be delighted to see you at Stedleigh."

Helen bent down her head, and twisted her bracelet round her arm.

"I am not sure about it," she said, after a moment.

"You must be sure. What is to prevent it? Do say that you will come."

"Well, yes, I think so," she said after another pause, and then drawing a music book towards her, she asked, as if anxious to change the conversation, "shall I play you something from your favourite Norma?"

Osborne said, yes, mechanically, and leant back once more with his head against his hand.

While Osborne and Helen Douglas talked in the drawing room, Archie sat in his own room, not writing letters as he had said, but with his feet cased in a pair of slippers; one of them comfortably laid against the side of the grate, and the other on the fender, he was enjoying the luxury of a good smoke, and the contents of Miss Osborne's letter at the same time. A half conscious feeling regarding Grace, led him to put it in his pocket when he received it, instead of opening it as he had his mother's and Marion's. Miss Osborne had always a special word to say about Grace,

or a message in return for one that Archie sent her. Indeed, her letters almost seemed to belong to Grace, and Archie's replies to his friend were more frequent, and written in a different spirit to what they would have been, if he did not know Grace was to read them. Grace would be over to The Cliff to look for a letter, and Grace must not be disappointed. His correspondence with Miss Osborne had been kept up just as regularly as his correspondence with his mother and sister, and I am ashamed to say he found himself looking out for her letters, far more eagerly than for theirs, although it would seem he was in less haste to read them.

The letter he was reading then, was a pretty long one, as ladies letters are apt to be, and covered two sheets of closely written note paper. It began by telling of the Admiral's health, then followed some Stedleigh news, about which Archie cared nothing, but after the Stedleigh news came something he did care for, a word about Grace. "Your friend Grace Clifford is sitting with me while I

write, and will put this in the post. She desires me to thank you for remembering her in your last, and sends her love." That was all Miss Osborne said about her, but little as it was, it was the best part of the whole letter to Archie. His friend Grace Clifford, Miss Osborne had truly named her. Was she not the dearest friend he had? She would not write to him though, the little prude, and Archie felt half angry when he remembered her hesitating refusal, the night before he left Stedleigh. He wished he was back with her again, he was beginning to get tired of Inchcauldie, Helen Douglas, and that dry, hard, old father of hers. Yes, he wished he was back at Stedleigh with his mother, Marion, and Grace.

He had laid down Miss Osborne's letter on his knee while he was thinking, and now he took it up again, and went on reading it.

He found nothing more that he cared about, until he came to the end, and then under Miss Osborne's signature were two lines in another hand—

"I have read all your letters. I am glad you are enjoying yourself, but I hope you will be back soon.

"Your friend,

"G——."

A quick beat came to Archie's heart as his eye fell on the unexpected words. Did Miss Osborne see them, or had Grace added them to her letter without her knowledge?

"It was brave of her to tell me that she wished me to come back. By Jove what a fool I was to mind her; she would have answered me if I had written." He laid the letter down again. Should he write as it was? No, he had better not. He would be home in a week, it was scarcely worth while now. He threw the end of his cigar in the fire, and lighting a fresh one, went on smoking and thinking.

At eleven o'clock, Harry Osborne opened Archie's door, and came in.

"Still up. Have you written your



letters?" he said coming over to the fire, and leaning his elbow on the mantelpeice.

"No, not one Harry," Archie answered, with a half smile.

"What the deuce were you doing then?"

"Nothing,—smoking, and dreaming."

"Aye, we are all dreaming I think," Harry answered, lighting a cigar, "When does your father intend taking us out of this place?"

"Are you tired of it Harry? for faith I am," Archie said stretching his arms, and yawning.

"I think it's time we went back to Sted-leigh," Harry replied, without saying whether he was tired or not.

"So do I," Archie answered, thinking of Grace's wish at the close of Miss Osborne's letter.

Separated from the two young men by a few inches of brick and mortar, Helen Douglas sat in the adjoining room, in her dressing gown, brushing her long shining hair, and thinking of her cousin Archie.

Osborne's chance observation about the

special messages had set her quick wits to work, and during Archie's absence, she managed to extract from Harry, that he alluded to Miss Clifford, the daughter of the rector of Stedleigh. But he said he had been only quizzing Archie, and it was all nonsense. However, Helen did not like the thing at all, although she strove to persuade herself, first, that Harry told the truth about the quizzing, and then that she did not care.

She did not deny to herself that she would willingly accept the admiration of her handsome cousin, she liked to be admired, and she knew that she was handsome. She had not spent part of two seasons in London without discovering that.

She had dangles and admirers there by the score, and one or two earnest lovers as well; but these last were not of the kind to satisfy either her taste or her ambition, and she had learned to know that the rest followed her for her beauty, and married other women for their money.

Helen's experience of life while under

the charge of her cousin Lady Mackenzie, had made her wiser in the world's ways, but not better. Such teaching rarely improves a woman. A taste for the luxuries of life, without the means of satisfying it, was all that Helen carried away with her from London to Inchcauldie.

She kept it manfully down however, because she could not afford to indulge in it, and tried to interest herself in the daily cares, and petty economies in which she had been brought up.

But, as she sat in her room brushing her hair, she was not thinking of her narrow mode of life, neither was she thinking of last season's dangles, nor of last season's lovers, but of Archie Douglas, Grace Clifford, and the special messages. Of course it was all nonsense about Grace, Archie did not care for her, and Mr. Douglas would not approve of it even if he did. If he had any matrimonial plans for his son, they seemed to point towards herself. He always shewed a desire to see her and Archie together, and he had even invited her to Stedleigh.

Well Archie would be better than Ranald Douglas of Kilfin, and at that thought Helen shrugged her shoulders under her dressing gown.

She would not marry Ranald Douglas, she was determined upon that, no matter whether her father wished it or not.

Then she began wondering what sort of place the Grange was. Of course it was not to be compared to Stedleigh. What a pity that Stedleigh did not belong to Archie, instead of going with Marion to Harry Osborne.

As she thought of Harry, a smile came to her face, and she shrugged her shoulders under her dressing-gown again.

"What a goose he is to be sure," she muttered, and the brush came more rapidly through her hair.

## CHAPTER XV.

“WILL THAT DO ANGUS?”

IN a small room at the back of the drawing-room at Inchcauldie, Mr. Douglas of Stedleigh, and his cousin Angus, sat together one night in the close of September.

This room was called by courtesy, Mr. Douglas's study, yet there were none of the appliances for a study about it. In the time of old Mr. Douglas, as he was called, Angus's father, the place had been more appropriately named, the office.

In those days, as now, the account books belonging to the farm were kept there,

in a great press close by the fire place, for the Laird of Inchcauldie tilled his own land, going [about the farm, and looking after his interest with a keen eye, as his son did after him. In the office in question, the brawny Scotch labourers were accustomed to appear of a Saturday night, in order to receive payment for their week's work, from their master's own hand; but after the old man's death, Angus brought a gay young wife from Edinburgh, the daughter of a poor Scotch gentleman, who had more pride than tocher, and was glad to see her comfortably settled down at Inchcauldie.

This lady carried some of her flashy town notions into the quiet home of Angus Douglas, and it was owing to her that the office, without in the least changing its use, lost its old name in the new one, which Mrs. Angus Douglas attached to it.

It was a small, square room, by no means luxuriously, nor even comfortably, furnished. In the centre stood a strong table of stained wood, with an oaken desk on the top of

it. Before this table was a large heavy armchair, on the seat of which a leather cushion was placed, but no attempt whatever had been made to soften the back, which exhibited a surface of hard wood, polished by frequent use.

A square of carpet, of the mixed colours of dark red and brown, covered the middle of the room, but was not large enough to spread over the entire space, small as it was, and an edging of white deal board was visible between the end of the carpet and the wall. Across the front of the table, extending from it to the door, was a broad strip of stout oilcloth, which received, and resisted the impression of the labourers' heavy shoes, as they advanced, one by one to the table, to be paid at the close of each week.

On those occasions, Angus Douglas occupied the chair facing his desk, along the ledge of which, he carefully placed the small sums of money that were to be the reward of a hard week's toil. For Angus, like his cousin at Stedleigh, kept no idlers.

every man should have his wages, but every man must earn them.

It was a fair enough maxim, if the wages had been proportioned to the work, which the hire of a labouring man rarely is ; such as it was, however, each got the sum agreed on, and that sum being as much as other people paid, why Angus Douglas was no worse than his neighbours, and that is more than many of us can say.

The walls of the room were hung with buff paper, which had looked dingy and soiled when it was first put on, and looked dingy and soiled ever since. Above the fire place there was a few large-headed nails. On those nails hung files full of dusty papers and receipts, respecting transactions of old date, that could by no possibility be of use to any one, but which Angus's love of preserving everything, prevented his having the courage to burn.

The large press by the chimney piece contained all the more recent receipts, belonging to the household, and land expenditure, filed like their neighbours above the



mantel piece ; but more carefully secured under lock and key, along with the account books from year to year. Those of a past date were placed in regular order on the upper shelves, where they could be got at, and referred to at any moment. On the shelf below, just within reach of Mr. Douglas's hand, were laid the books in more immediate use, and along with them a long narrow ledger, in which the master of Inchcauldie kept strict register of all expenses whatsoever, and the money that remained for investment at the year's end, out of his careful savings.

That record of trifling gathering, and petty hoarding, would have seemed but a poor thing in the eyes of Angus's rich cousin ; yet paltry as it was, it had stepped between him and a special wish of his, by materially aiding in the purchase of Glenlure, the deed respecting which, signed and ready for return by the next day's post, lay in that same press upon the top of the long book, that contained the entry of those pitiful savings. The key of the press was in the

lock, the small bunch, of which it formed one, hung from the ring it was attached to, just over the head of Angus Douglas, who sat by the fire with a hand on each knee, and his eyes fixed on the face of Mr. Douglas of Stedleigh. Between them was a small table, from which reeked up a hot bowl of punch, manufactured from good Scotch whiskey.

It was a wet windy night, and the breeze came whistling over the heather, and rattled against the windows of the house, bringing the rain with it, while the two old men sat cozily enjoying the good fire, and the hot punch. Mr. Douglas was to leave Inchcauldie in two or three days; and he was there to talk about business, but business was all the more likely to be well discussed by the aid of the steaming bowl before them.

"This is good whiskey Angus," Mr. Douglas remarked, as he finished his tumbler, and replenished it from the bowl at his elbow. "It is many a day since I drank Inchcauldie whiskey."

"Aye, it's none the worse for never having

seen an exciseman," the other answered with a chuckling laugh.

"Do they smuggle up here now? I thought all that was at an end?" Mr. Douglas observed, sipping the punch nevertheless, law enforcer and magistrate though he was. He did not approve of poaching hares, but he was not particular about smuggled whiskey.

"They do over in the island on the loch, and there is no whiskey like it."

"You should not encourage them Angus," Mr. Douglas said, with faint disapproval, at the same time raising his glass to his lips.

"That's nonsense. It's better than the government whiskey, and I get it for half the money."

This last argument was unanswerable; and Angus Douglas took a good dip into his tumbler, and putting his hands on his knees again, smiled over at his cousin.

"This is but a poor place," he said, "I don't doubt but when you get back to Stedleigh, you will say the whiskey is the best thing about it. Are you going there direct?"

"I think not. I will likely go to London about some business."

"I wonder Stedleigh gets on without you?"

"It gets on very well. I have a steward who acts in my absence, and corresponds regularly with me; so that I know everything that goes forward, as well as if I were there."

"They are a robbing set," Angus answered.

"Watkins is a very respectable man. His brother has just got a farm under me, from which I turned out a fellow that used to poach my hares."

"A tenant of yours?"

"Well, no, his father was a tenant. I took care the son should not get the land."

"The son will go to ruin I suppose. Have you put him in jail?"

"No: I am sorry I could not get a good enough catch at him for that. The rascal was too many for me; but I am on the look out after him, so he had better let my hares alone," Mr. Douglas said, winding up his

speech by a draught from his tumbler of smuggled whiskey punch.

"Have you much game at Stedleigh?" Angus asked.

"Well, yes, a good deal. It has been well taken care of the past two years."

"Aye, well I almost wonder why you bothered yourself coming here for the shooting; but I suppose you wanted to have a look at the old place."

The acute blue eyes of Angus Douglas looked up, and met eyes as acute as themselves. For nearly four weeks it had been thrust and parry between these two, Archibald vainly trying to lead Angus to the subject of Inchcauldie, which he was determined not to approach until he had the deed relating to Glenlure in his possession. That deed was now safe in the press behind him, therefore he led up to the subject Archibald was anxious to broach.

"I did want to look at the old place, as you say Angus," Mr. Douglas replied at once; "it is the last corner left of the old land which be-

longed to us; yet it was not altogether to look at it that I came."

"So I was guessing," Angus answered quietly.

"I see you know what I am driving at," Mr. Douglas rejoined, seeing he might as well go direct to the main point. "Now Angus, you know by right Inchcauldie is mine; of course I mean, if things had gone as they ought."

"Aye, so you always said," was the cautious answer. "But it was left to my father and it is mine, now. The law is on my side."

"I am not talking of law; I am talking of right. My grandfather had no business to pass over his eldest son."

"May be he had, and may be he had not; it's all according to people's notions."

Mr. Douglas took another sip from his tumbler, and looked into the fire. The negotiation did not promise much at the beginning. Would he be able to manage that intractable old man before the end?

“Do you go straight to London from this?” Angus asked, presently.

“Yes; is there anything I can do for you?”

“No, I don’t recollect of any; I had a little parcel to send, but postage is cheap now, and I won’t trouble you.” He reflected that the petty saving was not worth the risk of entrusting the deed respecting Glenlure to the care of Mr. Douglas. “I have some money in a mining Company, which I want to withdraw,” proceeded Mr. Douglas. “It is too much trouble to me now to be looking after speculations.”

“Aye, you are getting old Archibald, you need rest at your time of life.”

Angus’s words jarred on him. Getting old and needing rest. Those iron sinews of his would surely last for many a day to come.

“We are all getting old, Angus,” he said.

“Aye, I am old too, you are only seven years older; still, seven years are something, not much, but something,” Angus

answered, unwilling to lose the advantage they gave him.

"True," Mr. Douglas said.

"You were speculating in mines," Angus observed, after a moment's thought, returning to the subject Mr. Douglas's remark had opened, "I had a speculation once in them myself, and I got on very well."

"Did you sell your shares?"

"Aye, I wanted the money for another thing, so I sold them, and then it lay awhile idle."

"But you invested it anew, I suppose?"

"Aye." And Angus gave a sly glance at the press where the deed lay.

"Now, Angus," Mr. Douglas said, coming back with a jerk to the business they had been talking of previously, "before I leave this I want to have a talk with you. You are a careful enterprising man by nature. You have never had the means to exercise your powers, because you never had the money. If I had had your ability, I should have been a far richer man than I am to-day. You said to me when I came here, that land



was better than money. Money in the hands of a man who knows how to use it, is far more capable of increase than land."

"Aye, if I had had money to work on when I was young; but I am too old to begin such things now."

"Too old, you are not sixty man."

"Well, I want quiet for the rest of my days. Besides, I have begun gathering land, and I like that best, you see."

"If you are bent on buying land, I'll give you as much for Inchcauldie as will purchase a place three times the value of it."

"You came here about that business before Archibald, and I guessed you had come about it now."

"Well, suppose I have, what do you say to it?"

"I said, no, then, and I say no, now," he said, with his hands more firmly planted on his knees. "I'll not sell the place; Inchcauldie goes with Helen, and Helen goes with Inchcauldie."

"Have you promised her to that fellow, Kilfin?" Mr. Douglas asked.

"May be I have, and may be I have not."

"Well, of course you can do as you like. But I would be willing to give a generous price for Inchcauldie Angus; and I think it more than likely Douglas of Kilfin would rather have the money than the place."

"He might no doubt; but I'll put him from selling it, if that's what you mean."

"No, I do not mean it. I mean that he would be better pleased to get hard cash with Helen, than to get Inchcauldie."

"Aye, but silver melts," Angus said, returning to his old opinion.

"You can buy land with it then, if land be your hobby. Give me an account of the rents, and I'll give you thirty years purchase, money down."

Angus shook his head. "If you had a son it would be a different thing; but property always goes out of a family if there be a girl."

"Not if she marries one of her own name," the old man said, obstinately returning to his original line of argument.

Mr. Douglas leant back thoughtfully. He had another card to play, but he would not play it yet.

"I would even make an advance on the thirty years purchase; Angus, say what you will take, and if you ask with any conscience, I'll give it to you."

Angus shook his head.

"Nonsense man, think of it, there is no hurry; I have a fancy for the place, and I don't mind paying for it."

"It is not much to what it used to be," Angus said, thoughtfully; "but my grandfather made away with everything he could sell. If he had lived a little longer he would have made away with Inchcauldie too."

"Well, we might manage to get it all back again; property is sure to come into the market sooner or later. By the by, did you hear any thing of Nelson of Glenlure, he did not come over this season."

"No, he does not always come. Were you thinking you might see him?" Angus asked, with an enquiring look at Mr. Douglas.

"Yes, I thought I might," he said at once seeing the other fathomed his thought.

"Is the place still to be sold?"

"Not now."

"Not now? Why he changed his mind very soon."

"Who?"

"Mr. Nelson, I thought he wanted to sell it when I came here."

"Aye, but you see he has not got it now."

"Who has it then?"

"Well I had a little money by me, and seeing it was going cheap I bought it," Angus answered, with a shrug of his shoulders.

"You bought it to add to Inchcauldie," Mr. Douglas said in angry surprise. "Why did you not tell me this before?"

"Well you see I have a fashion of never telling my business, until it's settled, There are always so many slips," Angus answered warily.

"Glenlure is worth something to me, as well as Inchcauldie. I'll buy them both

from you, Angus. It would be the same thing to me to have it from you, as from Mr. Nelson."

"Aye, but Glenlure and Inchcauldie are one now Archibald. What I said before, I say again, Inchcauldie goes with Helen, and Helen goes with Inchcauldie."

Mr. Douglas leant back and thought, Did Angus wish to unite Inchcauldie, Glenlure and the Grange, all in one? If so, the marriage with Douglas of Kilfin, was but a feint of the crafty old man, and those words "Helen goes with Inchcauldie, and Inchcauldie goes with Helen," meant something very different.

Helen herself would not like to have Douglas thrust on her. He had taken care to sound her on that point, and found her far from favourably disposed towards her cousin of Kilfin.

Helen had a will of her own, but Helen's will, even if exerted against her marriage with Ranald Douglas, could not alter the case as regarded Inchcauldie, so Mr. Douglas, more and more convinced that his card

and Angus Douglas's were one, determined to play it at once.

This last card by which he hoped to win Inchcauldie was Archie, and even when prepared to play it, Mr. Douglas felt it was not a safe card. However, once played he was determined to abide by it, so throwing away the momentary doubt of Archie's submission to the arrangement, he drew himself up, and began the attack anew.

"Tell me honestly, Angus, have you promised Helen to Douglas of Kilfin?" he said outright. "Would no other arrangement satisfy you?"

"Aye, if it were a better one it might," Angus answered, not much moved towards giving a direct answer, by Mr. Douglas's demand.

"Of course I mean a better one: Archie, for instance. I don't see a clearer way for settling matters than this, always supposing the young people like each other."

"Aye, always supposing, but you see there is no accounting for what they may do."

"Yes, that is very true, but they are both young and handsome, and by throwing them together as they have been lately, they will be sure to end by falling in love. If Helen was ready to marry Ranald Douglas, there can't be much difficulty for Archie."

"Aye, he is a fine lad, a very fine lad. But I never said Helen was ready to marry Ranald; I said nothing at all about her readiness."

"You said she was to marry him, because he was a Douglas."

"I always meant her for a Douglas, as I had no son."

"Well as you say Inchcauldie goes with Helen, you will settle that on her children, and the moment Archie is married, I shall give him up possession of the Grange."

"How much may the Grange be worth?" Angus asked cautiously.

"About a thousand a year."

"That is not much. Inchcauldie and Glenlure are worth over four hundred, and that is more for a girl to bring, than a man

to bring a thousand; Ranald Douglas has more than that."

"Well not much more, and I doubt if you could get Helen to marry Ranald Douglas. Suppose now I settle the Grange on Archie's eldest son, and give ten thousand pounds for younger children; will that satisfy you? They will get much more than that at my death, for Archie's children shall be as my children."

"You have another child you know Archibald."

"Yes, but Marion is well provided for in Stedleigh, far better than Archie." There was a tone of discontent in Mr. Douglas's voice, by which Angus Douglas knew the possession of Stedleigh by Marion, was a sore point in his mind. He was silent a moment and then he said, "Will that do Angus?"

"Yes," the other answered, holding out his hand, "it will do."



## CHAPTER XVI.

## SPRING DAYS AT STEDLEIGH.

It was early spring before Helen Douglas came to Stedleigh, her father's health having prevented her visiting it at Christmas.

The five months which have elapsed since we left her and Archie at Inchcauldie, produced nothing of sufficient interest to justify our following them step by step ; therefore passing over the intervening space in silence we find all our old friends circled round Stedleigh, with Helen Douglas in their midst.

In less than a week after her arrival, Helen found herself quite at home in her new quarters. She fitted in naturally and grace-

fully, to the new life Stedleigh opened to her, which was so very different to her life at Inchcauldie. Inchcauldie seemed poor by comparison with Stedleigh; and Lady Mackenzie's London house and small array of servants, seemed poor by comparison with it also. If she married Archie Douglas, a life at least something like this, would be within her reach. Mr. Douglas had money at his disposal that would add considerably to Archie's prospects, money saved out of the rents of Stedleigh and the Grange, which had been accumulating for many years. Archie could afford her much to satisfy her ambition, she could stand on an equal footing with the county families, drive her own carriage, and entertain her friends with liberal hospitality. She had visions too of a house in London during the season, and many other things besides, which Archie's income was to bring her.

Archie himself, quite unconscious of the calculations respecting the Grange rents, and his father's funded money, that Helen was indulging in, was as attentive as ever to his cousin. He had liked her in Scotland, and

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1. The first step in the process is to identify the problem or issue that needs to be addressed. This involves gathering information and understanding the context of the problem.

2. Once the problem is identified, the next step is to define the objectives and goals of the project. This helps to clarify what needs to be achieved and provides a clear direction for the work.

3. The third step is to develop a plan or strategy to address the problem. This involves breaking down the problem into smaller, manageable tasks and determining the resources and timeline needed to complete them.

4. The fourth step is to implement the plan. This involves putting the strategy into action and monitoring progress to ensure that the project is on track.

5. The final step is to evaluate the results of the project. This involves assessing the outcomes against the objectives and goals and identifying any lessons learned for future projects.

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coarse in her robustness ; she was not loud voiced, or over-talkative ; but she possessed one of those vigorous natures that need activity and amusement ; a nature that was sure to make it for herself and others. There were rides and walks, or pleasant carriage drives to be got up during the fine spring weather. Visitors too, were more frequent since Helen's arrival. Ladies came from curiosity to see the beautiful Scotch girl they had heard so much of, and went away trying to persuade themselves that she was not so very lovely after all. Gentlemen came to admire, and join in a walk or ride, to show Miss Douglas this, or to shew Miss Douglas that. Helen understood it all, and laughed. It was her old London dangles over again. If Archie had not been in the way she would have enjoyed a good flirtation with them, but Archie was the game she was in pursuit of at present, and she knew his quick temper too well, to venture on such a proceeding. Had she known as much as we do, she might have indulged herself without fear of Archie's resentment. However, not knowing this, she was the very pink of dis-

cretion. Consequently her followers dropped off one by one, and left the field open.

Next to Archie the person that was most in Helen's society was Harry Osborne, but his attentions were of a fitful and uncertain kind. At one moment he would leave Marion's side to walk with Helen; at another he would object to Marion going out at all. It was too hot or it was too cold; and he would sit in the house by her the entire day, lounging in a chair, or lolling on the end of a sofa.

One morning Archie proposed a ride to see some old ruins beyond Cranston. Helen, delighted at the idea, went at once to put on her habit, and came down looking very handsome in her pretty riding hat.

"What, Marion, not ready yet!" she exclaimed, seeing her cousin seated by Harry in the drawing-room window, Archie having gone to give orders about the horses.

Marion declared she did not wish to go. She was so tired after their long ride yesterday, she would not venture on another to-day.

“ Nonsense. Come Marion,” Helen said, “ You will be the better of being roused. You have moped over that work all the morning. How can you interest yourself so constantly with it?”

“ Yes do, Marion,” Harry said, joining Helen in her persuasions. He wanted to go himself; and he did not like leaving her alone. But Marion shook her head.

“ What do you say, Mrs. Douglas?” Helen asked, as that lady entered the room, followed by Archie. “ Will you induce Marion to come with us to see the old abbey at Cranston?”

“ To be sure you will go Marion. Why not?”

“ I am really too tired for a ride to-day, mamma.”

“ I sha’n’t go either then,” Harry said. “ I shall stay at home and help you to crochet.”

“ It’s not crochet, it’s wool work,” Archie answered, laughing.

“ How do you know the difference, Archie?” Helen asked.

"Oh, I know something about work. I can thread a needle, and sew on a button."

"Very clever indeed," Helen said, laughing. "But come Marion, get on your habit."

"Yes, do, or I won't go," Harry added.

"Indeed you must, Harry. You shall not lose a day's enjoyment on my account. Helen, you will manage him, he has got out of my hands since he went to Scotland. He is not half as agreeable and obedient as he used to be."

Helen coloured and laughed. "I must deny that Scotland has anything to do with his turbulent behaviour, Marion. But it is you that is troublesome now. See, there are the horses; will you go and get ready?"

"Where is the necessity of riding, my dear? if you are tired," Mrs. Douglas observed, "I'll ring and order the carriage."

"To be sure. I never thought of that; I should quite enjoy a drive."

Harry shrugged his shoulders, looked at



the horses with a discontented eye, and walked to another window.

"Am I to be poked in a carriage, while Archie rides?" he muttered. "By Helen," he was going to add, but he cut off the last two words.

"As the carriage is going, mother, you may as well join us too," Archie suggested.

"That is a very good notion, Archie," Mrs. Douglas said. "And here is Grace Clifford: suppose we take her prisoner, and bring her with us."

Archie sprang out of the drawing-room door and met Grace on the steps. Helen looked after him with a frown on her pretty forehead, but said nothing. She had seen Grace at Stedleigh before more than once; and she had seen her at dinner at the Rectory on one occasion, when the Stedleigh people dined with Mr. Clifford. But from the first she met her with an antagonistic feeling. Grace was not only pretty enough to give her uneasiness, but Archie was suffi-

ciently attentive to her to add to it. He had tried to explain to her about Grace, on the ground of their being very old friends. Helen did not believe in such friendship; and she had not forgotten Harry's remark at Inchcauldie, respecting the special messages. Mrs. Douglas and Marion appeared to be on Grace's side, too. They both seemed so fond of her, and so glad when she came to Stedleigh, but, perhaps, that was because they knew Archie had no thought of her. Their friendship might not have been so strong in that case. These things had gone through Helen's mind before, when Grace was present; but in her absence, her suspicions grew faint, and she half believed Archie's version of the friendship.

"Well, Grace, my dear, how are you?" Mrs. Douglas said, as she came in with Archie. "You are just come in time to join our drive."

Mrs. Douglas, Marion, and Harry, had shaken hands with her; Helen only bowed,

keeping her whip in her right hand, to shew she had no intention of giving it.

"Grace will ride, mother; Marion can lend her a habit; and she can use her horse, too, it's ready saddled."

"No, no, Archie; I would rather go in the carriage with Mrs. Douglas and Marion," Grace said, who did not relish a ride along with Helen.

"Are you cowardly, Grace?" Archie asked.

"No; she is not cowardly; but she would rather have me than you. Is not that it, Grace?" Marion said.

"Of course it is," Grace answered, with a flush.

"Archie will take care of you," Mrs. Douglas observed to Grace, as she left the room to dress, followed by Marion and Helen, who had taken no farther notice of the visitor than the distant bow she gave on her entrance.

Instead of going upstairs with her cousin, Helen walked out of the hall-door; and, gathering up her habit, crossed the terrace,

and began looking at the flower-beds. After a minute or two she turned away, and went towards the drawing-room window. Archie and Grace were still standing at the table, and Harry in the farthest window. Helen looked in and smiled at Archie, without ever glancing at Grace. He answered her smile, and she beckoned for him to come out. He hesitated; and then saying something to Grace, passed through the hall and joined her on the terrace. There they paced up and down, until Mrs. Douglas, Marion, Harry, and Grace, made their appearance, and then the whole party set out on their excursion.

When they reached the ruins, they alighted and walked about; Archie between Grace and Helen; Harry, with Marion and Mrs. Douglas; until it was time to return home.

"Do you know I have a great mind to drive back and let Harry ride with Helen," Archie said; leaning against the side of the carriage, after he had helped the ladies in, having left Harry to put Helen on her horse.

"You are not in earnest, Archie?" Helen said; moving her horse a step nearer to him, as she spoke.

"Yes; I have got enough of horseback to-day. Come Harry, give me your seat inside here, and there's my horse for you."

"Yes Archie, here is room for you," Marion said; unselfishly parting with Harry, to gratify her brother's whim for driving home.

"You will let me ride with you, won't you Miss Douglas?" Harry said; as he stood at the side of Helen's horse.

"Of course, I shall be delighted," she answered; resolved to indemnify herself with Marion's lover, for Archie's desertion.

Harry sprang to his horse and rode on by her side. He was in the highest spirits. It was one of those days, when he threw off the lounging silent habit he had fallen into of late, of which Marion had jestingly complained to Helen in the drawing-room. Helen and he chatted gaily as they went along. Whatever momentary anger she felt towards Archie seemed to vanish immedi-

ately, and she did not make herself the less agreeable to Harry on that account.

When the carriage passed through Stedleigh, it stopped at the Rectory-gate, to let down Grace, and then drove on to the Manor, which they reached just in time to dress for dinner.

"What do you think of Helen and Archie, mamma?" Marion asked that evening, as she and Mrs. Douglas sat together on a sofa, over their coffee.

"I don't know, dear. Your father seems to like it; but for my part, I never was much taken with any Douglas I ever met, out of Stedleigh. What does Harry say?"

"Very little; he rarely speaks of Helen. I scarcely know what he thinks of her."

Mrs. Douglas made no reply; but looked thoughtfully across the room to where Archie and Helen sat. And then at Harry, who was wheeling a chair to the corner of the sofa next Marion.

## CHAPTER XVII.

## A DIP INTO POLITICS.

"HAMILTON's son stand for the county? I tell you its all nonsense, all d—d nonsense. Where would he get the money?"

The speaker struck the table emphatically with his hand, as if to make his assertion more forcible.

These words were spoken by Mr. Reddington, of the Grove, a wiry, ferretty little man, the very reverse of his large, heavy, help-mate, in a room in the hotel at Stedleigh, where Mr. Reddington, Admiral Osborne, Mr. Clifford, and two or three other gentlemen were assembled, discussing wine,

biscuits, and politics, after their magisterial labours were over.

It was market day. The window of the room looked out upon the square, where might be seen the busy farmers, buying and selling, mingling together talk and trade. Those whose business for the day was at an end, loitered round the doors of the public houses, rattling the loose silver in their pockets, while others were making their way inside, in order to spend some of it at the bar.

"Who said young Hamilton was going to stand?" Admiral Osborne asked, filling a glass of wine, and helping himself to a biscuit.

"I did, and you'll find I'm right. There is a requisition gone off to France, asking him to come forward, in the event of poor Mr. Brownlow's death. I met the steward this morning on the road, and he told me all about it," Mr. Clifford answered, who was always meeting people, and hearing everything.

"He'll stand then, as sure as a gun," the Admiral said.



"Then he'll fall I think, I tell you again it's all d—d nonsense. Who signed this requisition I wonder?" Mr Reddington asked, contemptuously.

"Don't be so sure. I'll bet you a five pound note Hamilton will walk over the course, unless government sends down a man to oppose him."

This observation came from a Mr. Belfield, who having declined wine and biscuit, stood leaning against the mantle-piece.

"What is it to you, Reddington?" Admiral Osborne asked.

"It's plenty to me, we want no more conservatives. I don't care a fig about Hamilton, but I'll not vote for him, or any other man, except he is a liberal."

"An out and out rabid radical, would be better than a conservative any day, Reddington," Mr. Clifford said, laughing.

"Wait until the man's dead, before you give away his shoes," a young man observed, who sat at the side of the table, peeling an orange, which he had dived into his pocket for a moment before. "Brown-

lowe is not gone yet; and more than that, I rode round his way, and learned that he is better."

Mr. Reddington was struck dumb an instant, and then he said, as if it settled the question, "That has nothing to do with it, sir."

"Faith, I think it has though," the young man answered, as he went on peeling his orange with provoking coolness.

There was a general laugh at Mr. Reddington's expense, who was by no means pleased at a joke being raised against him, by a young fellow, who as he said afterwards, had not sat three times in his life on the bench. A very greenhorn in the commission of the peace.

"Suppose you stand yourself Reddington. I'll back you," Mr. Clifford said, slapping him on the shoulder.

The young magistrate had risen, and now stood by the fire place, with Mr. Belfield.

"Gad, he would have impudence enough to do it, if he thought he had a chance,"

he said in a tone so low, as only to catch the other's ear. "There is nothing good about that fellow except his niece.

"There are friends of Mr. Hamilton here, I think," Mr. Reddington said, glancing over at Mr. Belfield and his companion Mr. Beauchamp, with a look that hinted a suspicion of treason.

"Mr. Hamilton has friends everywhere," Belfield answered, shrugging his shoulder and without looking round, he continued the low toned conversation the young magistrate had begun.

"Well, I am no friend of Mr. Hamilton, not that it is himself I war against, but principles," Mr. Reddington said. "Conservatives are out of date, we want more of them. What good did they do? that's the question. They narrowed franchise, they fought against reform; reform was had in spite of them. We want them, and we won't have them. As for Hamilton, he has no money, his estate is dipped to its neck. He could not afford to stand a contest."

"Yes, but suppose there is no contest," Admiral Osborne suggested.

"Suppose there is no contest, Admiral. I won't suppose any such thing. Government will send down a man."

"Did Government tell you so, Mr. Reddington?" the young magistrate asked.

"No sir, but I am up to the common sense of the thing."

"After all, where is the use of our talking," Admiral Osborne rejoined. "There are the fellows who will settle the question," and he pointed with his finger to the market square, where still loitered the rosy farmers, jingling the money in their pockets, and troubling themselves more with the price of wheat, than the prospect of their future member.

"Aye, Reddington will get them a rank radical. A liberal is too poor a thing to go into the field with, in these extreme days, and he will throw him and his eloquence on the support of an enlightened democracy," Mr. Clifford said, with a wink over at Mr. Belfield. "Who are you for, Admiral?" he added, filling another glass of wine for himself.

"Oh me, I am too old to meddle in politics now."

"Unless Mr. Reddington's candidate promises to vote for an increase in admirals' pay," Mr. Clifford observed, smiling.

"Yes, there is something practical in that Clifford. By Jove, it's a pity you can't stand yourself."

"Give me a shoulder to get on the bench of Bishops, and I might creep into Parliament that way," he said, laughing.

"If you were small enough of body, Clifford, you might slip in through a gimlet hole," Mr. Belfield remarked, returning Mr. Clifford's wink right over Mr. Reddington's head; for Mr. Belfield had got an idea that the wiry little politician had some notion of opposing Mr. Hamilton in his own proper person, as an extreme radical or oily liberal, whichever might be most acceptable to the electors of Cranston.

"There is a man in the square now, that I would like to see member," Mr. Reddington said, who sat near the window. "If he stood you would vote, admiral."

The other two gentlemen at the table stood up to look out, while Mr. Belfield and his friend gazed out likewise.

"Mr. Douglas," Admiral Osborne said, "I don't think you'll get him to trouble himself with politics at his time of life."

Mr. Douglas was standing in the centre of the street, talking with a farmer, who was a tenant on his estate, quite unconscious of the eyes that were fixed on him from the hotel window. He carried a large stick in his hand, on which he leant, while he listened to whatever the man said; and during the conversation, which lasted several minutes, he shook his head once or twice in token of dissent.

"He'll not vote for Hamilton, at any rate," Mr. Clifford said, resuming his seat. "They have an old quarrel of twenty years standing."

"What about?" the young magistrate asked, turning round with sudden interest.

"Just a few feet of land, a corner of the hill-side. One said one place was the boundary that divided their properties, and

the other said it was not; so to law they went, and spent more money on it than the whole thing was worth. Hamilton won the suit, and I don't think Mr. Douglas ever forgave him."

"Stand or not, he won't give Hamilton a lift with his vote," Mr. Belfield said. "It is wonderful how old enmities shew at election times."

"If Mr. Douglas would stand, Hamilton would go to the wall," Mr. Reddington answered. "This is not the time when people can carry things by the influence of a name. There is a different set of people in the franchise now, and they don't care a farthing for Mr. Hamilton's family influence."

It was not a wise hit for Mr. Reddington to make, before a set of men more than commonly proud of their old county families.

"May be a man of no family at all, would please the electors better than Mr. Douglas. If so, I can manage to get one for them," Mr. Belfield said.

Reddington stammered, and turned red.

"I don't object to family, I only object to a man who has no other claim but family," he said after a moment. "Mr. Hamilton has not lived amongst us these ten years. His son has been brought up in France, and knows as much of England as—as—" he hesitated, "as my boot."

"I beg your pardon Reddington, the illustration don't fit, for your boot has been on English ground ever since you put your foot in it man," Mr. Clifford said.

A roar of laughter followed the observation.

"He is a venomous fool," the young magistrate muttered to Mr. Belfield, as soon as he got his muscles in speaking order again. "A venomous fool."

"Who will you vote for, Clifford? as we are going to the poll to-day," Mr. Belfield said.

"Me! oh I don't intend to vote. I mean to keep myself clear of such things, and then I can wish success to both sides," and Mr. Clifford's bright, laughing eye, went from face to face with such an expression of droll fun, that every one laughed again.



"If Douglas goes in," Admiral Osborne said, with a shrug of his shoulders, "you will have a pretty hard time, canvassing for him, Reddington. You must stand up to your man."

"Trust me for that," Mr. Reddington answered.

"I tell you what Reddington," Mr. Clifford observed, putting a biscuit in his mouth, and moistening it with wine. "I'd recommend you not, to lead Mr. Douglas down to Williams's farm to look for votes, or you will get your member put in the pound."

A roar of laughter followed this last sally of our jovial parson's.

"Yes, faith, that is the best story I ever heard in my life. It's just six months since I laughed at it in this very room." Mr. Beauchamp said, when the laugh had subsided.

Just then the handle of the door was turned, and slowly entering with his hat in one hand, and his large stick in the other, Mr. Douglas made his appearance.

"You are a merry party, gentlemen," he

said, with a smile, as he shook hands right and left.

Some embarrassment was felt by those addressed, which was but natural, considering that the mirth his observation seemed to question the cause of, had been at his own expense.

"It was all at Mr. Reddington's cost I assure you, he has killed Mr. Brownlowe before the time, and has been out canvassing for his successor," Mr. Clifford said, readily.

"Bravo, Clifford to the rescue," Mr. Beauchamp whispered to his friend. "What do you think of our parson, Belfield?"

"Think? I think he is laughing at us all. Reddington is easily seen through, he is as transparent as glass; but what Mr. Clifford's leanings are, I defy any one to tell. He is a deep hand."

"I heard some one say that before," Beauchamp answered.

"Who?"

"Mr. Hensley."

The other nodded.

"Will you have a glass of wine, Douglas?"

the Admiral asked, filling it from one of the nearly empty decanters. "It's not Stedleigh wine, I can tell you."

"I am sorry to hear about poor Mr. Brownlowe; I only heard it as I came through the village," Mr. Douglas said, sipping his wine.

"Aye, he has had another attack, poor fellow," the Admiral said, compassionately. "I am sorry for him, as I believe his getting over this is doubtful."

"If he die Mr. Douglas, your friend Reddington there, says, you are to drop into his shoes," Mr. Clifford said.

"Indeed!" Mr. Douglas answered, while a very slight colour rose to his cheek. "Well, I am obliged to Mr. Reddington; but I fear I am not fit for politics now."

"So I said when he broached it," the Admiral answered, pulling out his watch. "I told him you were too old for a beginner."

"Yes, of course, we are all getting up the hill, Admiral; but still there are older men than me in parliament. We have a much older man at the head of the government."

“ Ah ! but he is an old stager ; he did not take his ship out of port yesterday.”

“ If Mr. Douglas won't stand we must get some one else. We won't have a conservative, and Hamilton is a red hot conservative.”

“ Hamilton !” Mr. Douglas said, in surprise.

“ Yes ; old Hamilton's son. Clifford tells us they have sent him a requisition, asking him to stand in case of a vacancy.”

“ Indeed !” was all Mr. Douglas said ; but he did not look pleased.

“ Mr. Reddington is signing a requisition to you ; he wants you to oppose him,” Mr. Clifford observed.

“ Me ! I don't wish to oppose any one,” Mr. Douglas said quietly.

“ He will walk over the ground, if there is not a contest,” Mr. Reddington answered.

“ Yes ; but government is sending down a pet candidate, so Mr. Reddington says, and he knows all about it,” Mr. Beauchamp observed, from the fireplace.

“ That gentleman is a little facetious, Mr. Douglas,” Mr. Reddington answered, testily.

"I said government would not allow a conservative in, nor will we; we are tired of them, upholding old notions, and trampling down the people."

"Every man his own master, no taxes. There will be a good cry for your London friend when he comes Mr. Reddington, and, by Jove, if he doesn't go into parliament on that, my name's not Beauchamp."

Another laugh followed Mr. Beauchamp's observation; and then Admiral Osborne shook hands with every one, and limped away to his carriage. Mr. Douglas finished his wine, and got up too in order to break up the party. Mr. Clifford rose likewise, and followed the Admiral to lend his arm to help him down the stairs.

"Well, Mr. Belfield, had you much to do on the Bench to-day?" Mr. Douglas asked, lingering a moment by the two gentlemen at the fire-place.

"There was little or nothing to-day. We are very good law keepers in this part of the country."

And then Mr. Douglas, shaking hands with

Mr. Belfield and Mr. Beauchamp, went out with Mr. Reddington.

"You'll not let Hamilton get in, Mr. Douglas," that gentleman said, as they got into the street.

"I don't know; I never dreamt of standing till you put it in my head. But you were very indiscreet to sound a warning note in that kind of way, before Brownlowe was dead."

"If he does not die he will resign. I tell you he can never sit in the house again; one side is altogether powerless."

"He'll not resign as long as he can move a muscle," Mr. Douglas answered. "I know his tenacity well. He will be too much afraid of letting in a liberal member."

"He must resign I tell you, and you will oust Hamilton if you choose to stand."

"I can't talk of it now, it's no use till we can see our way."

"Well if Brownlowe goes, I may come to you."

"Aye if, there is an 'if,' in it," Mr. Douglas answered, cautiously. "But do you

know who signed the requisition to Hamilton?"

"No, Clifford told all he knew about it, and he did not particularise any one; but I am certain you have left two of the names behind you."

"Then all the more fool you, to shew your hand man." Mr. Douglas answered. "Mr. Hamilton's friends will have their eyes open now."

"Beauchamp said Mr. Brownlowe was better," Mr. Reddington said, without noticing Mr. Douglas's remark.

"Yes, I dare say, I hope so," Mr. Douglas answered. "There is no knowing the turn paralysis takes, he got over the last attack, you know. I don't see that it is any business of mine one way or the other. I don't want to be thrust into politics."

"Then you are determined not to stand; am I to understand that?"

"Understand this, that I never discuss a case where there is only a possibility," Mr. Douglas said. "When the time comes, it is always time enough to think of

understanding. There is your carriage, Reddington."

A low hung, open carriage, was making its way through the market place, to the hotel. Mrs. Reddington and her niece were seated inside ; that niece being our old friend Miss Craig, to whom Mr. Beauchamp had alluded, when he said Mr. Reddington had nothing good about him except his niece. Mr. Douglas shook hands with both the ladies, and then leant upon the side of the carriage talking to Mrs. Reddington, who answered him, with her great sleepy eyes half closed. Miss Craig busying herself the while in glancing round the market place, and then up at the hotel windows, towards one of which she bowed, and laughed, and bowed again, as Mr. Beauchamp, having recognized the carriage, left the fireplace, and made his appearance in the window. Mr. Reddington went round to the other side of the carriage, opened the door, and got in beside his cumbrous wife. Mr. Douglas shook hands and said good bye, and the whole party drove off, leaving him bowing after them, with his hat in his hand.



As the carriage turned round through the market, Mr. Douglas replaced his hat, and pushed his way through some loiterers that barred his passage, until he reached a man who stood talking to a neighbouring farmer at the other side of the way. The man touched his hat, with a sullen kind of respect, as Mr. Douglas came up.

"I have been thinking of what you spoke to me about Thompson, since I saw you," he said, "and I'll manage it for you."

"Thank you sir," the man answered gratefully, touching his hat again, and Mr. Douglas went on.

Had Mr. Reddington been aware of that small act of concession to a man who had a vote for the county, he might have known that Mr. Hamilton was not likely to walk over the course free of opposition when the time came.

END OF VOL. I.





